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## REGIONAL LITERATURE OF THE SOUTH

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I do not know what astute phrase-maker coined the expression "regional literature." The ill-assorted mating must be recent, for *Webster's New Unabridged Dictionary* of 1934 makes no formal acknowledgment of the union. The modern ghost writers for the shade of the great master of words define "regional" as "of or pertaining to a region or territory, especially a geographical region," which does indeed leave the word available to any man's use. "As," says Webster, "regional governments; regional symptoms." I seem to have heard lately of "regional housing," which is an appropriate and decent joining, since the shelters over men's heads must be suitable protection against whatever climatic elements are peculiar to the section. "Regional literature," to the best of my knowledge, is an expression only a few years older than New Deal phraseology. It is as glib as W.P.A., C.C.C., and N.R.A. Time has not yet determined whether these terms are false or true—whether the Works Progress Administration truly progresses, or whether the Civilian Conservation Corps truly conserves. But I believe that the phrase "regional literature" is not only false and unsound but dangerous to a sharp appreciation of values, for the linking of the two words has brought in the connotation that if a piece of writing is regional, it is also literature.

Webster, again, defines literature as "literary productions as a collective body; as: (a) The total of preserved writings belonging to a given language or people. (b) Specifically, that part of it which is

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notable for literary form or expression, as distinguished, on the one hand, from works merely technical or erudite, and, on the other, from journalistic or other ephemeral literary writing."

Accepting the specifications of dictionary preciseness, I dare to say, as a writer who often suffers under the epithet of "regional," that there is very little regional literature of the South. I dare go farther and say that the sooner we divorce the two words the sooner shall we discourage the futile outpourings of bad writing whose only excuse is that they are regional, regionalism being at the moment a popular form of literary expression.

Regional stories are obviously stories laid in a circumscribed locale, dealing with characters peculiar to that locale. Somehow or other, regionalism has come to connote ruralism, perhaps because cities are much alike, and offer no localized customs or speech or human types to the field glass and butterfly net of the literary collector. Yet the customs of travel, the mode of life and of thought of natives of New York City are so specialized that a book written about New York City with the passion for detail and the odd patronizing condescension brought to many studies of remote rural sections would be truly a piece of regional writing. It would be tempting to write such a book, for the New Yorker's acceptance of his subways and his taxis and his cliff dwelling seems as outlandish and worthy of note as an Alabama poor white's acceptance of mules, drought, and the boll weevil. The truth is that the congregating of a high percentage of the American population in urban centers and the fluid nature of that population have within a generation made any stationary rural group, maintaining its own customs, a matter for wide-eyed contemplation.

I may be mistaken, but I believe that the words "regional literature" call to the average reader's mind either Middle West farm stories or stories of the South. In a greater number of cases my guess is that the first thought is of the latter. Middle West farm stories have sprung from a common nostalgia, recognized or unrecognized, for the land. They have usually been written either by one who has left the land or by one who has returned to it. Regional stories of the South have sprung from a recent and not quite explicable resurgence of interest in the South and in southern ways.

The Mason and Dixon line is as invisible but as definite as ever. Freer travel back and forth between the two sections has accentuated, rather than minimized, differences in mode of life and thought. Yankee tourists in Florida can be spotted across a hotel dining-room for their fluttery air of knowing themselves to be in a strange land. When grits, looking like Cream of Wheat, are served them for a vegetable, like potatoes, and when their puzzled eyes light on natives buttering or gravying those grits and eating them along with the meat and bread, they are as sheepish and as delighted as any Occidental set down at a Chinese table with a set of chopsticks, or confronted in Hawaii with the first dish of *poi*.

Fortunately, perhaps, though the South still disapproves of the North, the North has come to take—if, indeed, it ever lost it—a literary and faintly maternal interest in the South. It is not too far a step, after all, from the North's preoccupation with Fanny Kemble's *Diary* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to its horrified and rapturous embracing of *Tobacco Road*. Of recent years the South has been again fresh literary meat. To subtitle a book "A Tale of the South" was to guarantee a closer attention than would be given to a similarly mediocre story laid in Buffalo. The South simply became popular as a divertissement. And, after several generations of mistrust of the "rebels," the southern cause has come to be looked on with a sentimental sympathy.

There is a distinct parallel between recent interest in writings about the South and interest in the Irish revival of letters of a generation or so ago. The Irish cause, lost and losing, was picturesque and remote. Almost any stereotyped tale with the brogue thick enough could be published. And within the last ten years, to make an arbitrary demarcation, almost any articulate story of the South, be it of the past or the present, of a tenant farmer chopping cotton or a julep-drinking aristocrat under the unpainted pseudo-Greek columns of the ancestral mansion, was sure of an audience. The great wave, to the best of my memory, began with *So Red the Rose* and *Tobacco Road*, and reached its crest with *Gone with the Wind*. The success of the last no longer seems phenomenal when, to this peak of interest in the material itself, was added the author's terrific gift for swift narrative and, above all, for characterization. When a milieu that

had long fascinated sprang to physical life in the persons of characters so real that one would recognize them in the flesh—giving rise, incidentally, to the passionate furor over a choice of actors and actresses who should not betray that fleshly reality in the cinema version—an entranced reading public took the book to its bosom. That reading public includes the Old World, which has always found the American South glamorous.

The South also reads books about the South. That is because, while not too much concerned with what outsiders say about us, we are all agog to know what we say about one another.

Regional writing may be done either by outsiders or by insiders. It may be done by either outsider or insider from one of two approaches. It may be done deliberately—may I say “perpetrated?”—solely because it is regional. A businessman said to me the other day, “I should think the big market right now would be for war stories. Aren’t they the easiest trash in the world to write?” I said, “I wouldn’t know. I never wrote trash on purpose.” Regionalism written on purpose is perhaps as spurious a form of literary expression as ever reaches print. It is not even a decent bastard, for back of illegitimacy is usually a simple, if ill-timed, honesty. Regional writing done because the author thinks it will be salable is a betrayal of the people of that region. Their speech and customs are turned inside out for the gaze of the curious. They are held up naked, not as human beings, but as literary specimens.

Regional studies are legitimate when the purpose is sociological and scientific. The form in which such studies are presented should be a scientific form. When customs are quaint and speech picturesque, and it is desirable that a record be made, I suggest a Doctor’s thesis or the *National Geographic* as proper outlets. I cannot believe that regionalism, for the sake of regionalism, is valid material for creative fiction. I know that it is not literature. I know it from Webster’s definition. For literature is, specifically, that part of the preserved writings of a given language or people which is notable for literary form or expression, as distinguished, on the one hand, from works merely technical or erudite, and, on the other, from journalistic or other ephemeral literary writing. Without Webster, I should know it by the sense of shame with which I read it, and the even



greater sense of shame with which I sometimes catch myself in a possible danger of writing it.

The second approach to regional writing, whether by an outsider or by an insider, is valid. It may or may not result in literature, but it is honest. It is the approach of the sincere creative writer who has something to say and who uses a specialized locale—a region—as a logical or fitting background for the particular thoughts or emotions that cry out for articulation. This approach results in writing that is only incidentally, sometimes even accidentally, regional. It is only out of this approach that we can look for what may truly be called regional literature. For the producer of literature is not a reporter but a creator. His concern is not with presenting the superficial and external aspects, however engaging, of an actual people. It is with the inner revelation of mankind, thinking and moving against the backdrop of life itself with as much of dramatic or pointed effect as the artistry of the writer can command. The creative writer filters men and women, real and fancied, through his imagination as through a catalytic agent, to resolve the confusion of life into the ordered pattern, the co-ordinated, meaningful design, colored with the creator's own personality, keyed to his own philosophy, that we call art. Occupied with this magic-working, the creative writer finds a fictional character's speech, dress, and daily habits of importance only as they make that character emerge from the printed page with the aura of reality, so that the author has a convincing and effective medium for the tale he means to tell.

The degree of artistry that emerges from regional writing is proportionate to the writer's ability. If he writes badly, the most fascinating material in the world is only a fine horse to carry a crippled rider. If he writes well, he is almost independent of material, for his genius is able to transmute dross into gold and clay into sentience. Yet the best writing is implicit with a profound harmony between the writer and his material, so that many of the greatest books of all time are regional books, in which the author has used, for his own artistic purpose, a background that he loved and deeply understood. Thomas Hardy is a compelling instance.

So it is reasonable, I think, to expect to find this honest and artistic regionalism to a greater degree among native or long-resident

writers than among writers-in-search-of-material who may be struck by the novelty and usableness of a particular region.

But while native regionalism is more likely to be honest than what might be called journalistic or itinerant regionalism, it is artistic only as the writer is himself an artist. It is literature only as the author is literary. Without going into the moot question of sectional percentages, and with no intent to imply that the North, or the West, or New England, has a higher quota, I think it is indisputable that the present-day South, which has emitted literally tons of regional writing, has produced very little regional literature.

The matter of personal tastes and prejudices enters, dangerously, any specific evaluation of southern regional writing. The history of literature is crammed with mistakes in contemporary judgments. I have no desire to assume a voluntary and unnecessary martyrdom. I prefer to suggest this demarcation between regional writing and regional literature as a standard of judgment of whose soundness I am certain, and to retreat. Yet martyrdom and folly are more comfortable companions than cowardice, and I am willing to venture my personal opinions on a few southern writers as proof of the courage of my convictions.

To my mind, Ellen Glasgow stands alone in our generation as the creator of the only unmistakable regional literature of the South. Pulitzer prizes for "distinguished" novels are amazing anomalies when they ignore work of her literary distinction. Her literature, like Hardy's, is inherently regional, for while she would have written with great art of whatever people came into the ken of her interest, she is so steeped in the Virginia which she knows that it is an inextricable part of her work, like the colors of a painting or the dye of the wool of a tapestry. But she is first an artist and then a Virginian. If her books—unspectacular, but all the more sound—do not become part of "the total of preserved writings belonging to a given language or people" then I for one am willing to see other bound volumes go unpreserved.

It is, on the other hand, the spectacular quality of *Gone with the Wind*, or, more exactly, the spectacular quality of the book's popular success, that makes me unable to insist with equal certainty that it is literature. At the moment, I am inclined to think that it is. Five

years from now, when the tumult and the shouting shall surely have died, and I read it again, I believe I shall know, and others with me. A few critics, like little whirlpools isolated and individual in the sweeping flood of acclaim, have lamented a lack of "style." The charge is serious, if we are to stand firm with Webster on the specific need of literature to be "notable for literary form or expression, as distinguished . . . from . . . ephemeral literary writing." Yet we ask of style principally that it be an effective medium of expression for the material itself, and it seems to me that no narrative, no set of characters, could carry the excitement and the living conviction of this book unless the style were at least adequate.

There are three distinctly regional southern writers, some of whose books seem to me very close to literature. Yet, again, permanence, or relative permanence, is too difficult for me to gauge, short of the peculiar certainty that I feel for the work of Ellen Glasgow. These are, especially, Julia Peterkin and after her Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the negress, Zora Neale Hurston. My personal reaction to *Black April* and *Scarlet Sister Mary* is that they are of permanent value. If time deals harshly with them, at least there is no question but that they stand very high indeed in the intermediate zone, between "literature" and "ephemeral literary writings," of contemporary literature.

My reservations as to Elizabeth Madox Roberts are, first, that she evinces such a scholarly preoccupation with dialect speech as to force her work into the class of technical or erudite writings, invalidating its objective artistry; and, second, that the overpoetizing of the prose form invalidates the purity of the literary expression. Yet Mary Webb overpoetized the prose of *Precious Bane*, and the result was still literature. Frankly, I do not know.

It is the newest book by Zora Neale Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, that tempts me to admit her to my own private library of literature. The book is reminiscent of Thomas Mann's great *Joseph in Egypt*. A timeless legend, part of man's priceless literary and spiritual heritage, is here revived through the luminous negro mind. The book is racial, rather than regional, and I had best avoid a positive judgment on the excuse of irrelevancy to my subject matter.

There is a body of workman-like southern writers whose regional writings are completely free from the taint I so deplore, who write out of love and understanding of their sections, but whose ultimate artistry is inadequate for a claim to the creation of literature. The ice here is too thin for me to venture from shore. The list, at best, could only reflect personal prejudice and, no doubt, erroneous judgments. And of the writers guilty of regionalism for its own sake, the less said on a shameful subject the better.

This is patently not the place to discuss other southern writers whose work is not regional. There is perhaps a question as to whether Faulkner is or is not a regional writer, but I should not so classify him. The storm-swept realm of the libido knows no geography.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The foregoing paper was written for the Annual Luncheon of the National Council of Teachers of English in New York, November 25, 1939, but when the occasion arrived Mrs. Rawlings handed the manuscript to the secretary and faced her auditors with no paper between her and them. Her informal talk, which completely won the audience, made a number of revelations not in the formal essay. With Mrs. Rawlings' permission some of them are restated here from the editor's longhand jottings.

Before deserting New York for orange culture in Florida, Mrs. Rawlings had been writing short stories, but they proved unsalable. They were, she now thinks, not bad in technique but quite without the breath of life. Migrating to Florida, she was charmed by the country and by the essentially gentle and wise, though uneducated, people. They are pure stock similar to the people of the North Carolina and West Virginia mountains, with speech (truly Chaucerian) changed a little by environment. The inveterate profanity of the men is, as Mrs. Rawlings showed, merely a mannerism, hardly to be called irreverent or offensive. In manners and human dealings they are naïve and loyal. They are still possessed of courage and therefore appeal to her, as an opposite but equally real type appeals to Erskine Caldwell. After her migration she did some more short stories, this time of the new region which she liked so much. These were accepted by *Harper's Magazine*, but now seem to their author to be more nearly regional writing than her later work.

Then one day out hunting in the pine scrub, a district quite different from that of the orange groves, she became lost and finally had to sit down to await the coming of a rescue party. As she sat in the great silence she felt a profound peace and fell to wondering who lived in such country. She made the acquaintance of one scrub-country family and lived with them for months. Here she found herself, for the first time since leaving her father's farm to go to college, in full spiritual harmony with her environment. Such harmony, she feels, is so necessary to personal happiness that one should make great sacrifices to attain and maintain it; and necessary to the novelist, who must look upon his people and surroundings with humility and love. Out of this sojourn in the scrub came *South Moon Under*. If this book approaches literature, says its author, that is because (1) under the advice of her editor she excised its surplus of regional details and (2) she had something larger than sectional to say. The Florida folk speak of



moonrise, moon over, moonset, and moon under, and animal life seems to be moved by these moontides. So the book presents people who are happy in their harmony with their background and also the impression of tides of feeling which are beyond our understanding.

*Golden Apples* attempted to present an opposite type—the person who goes into new country and finds himself in rebellion against it. This book, which Mrs. Rawlings loves much as a mother loves a cross-eyed child, has probably too little regional character and too much of the Englishman, who should have been treated as an alien to the end. The time is fixed as that of the great freeze of 1894-95, not to present history but to use a historical fact without distortion as a natural means of producing the dramatic crisis in the lives of the characters.

The deservedly more popular *The Yearling* grew out of an idea which had been maturing for years—a boy's or girl's stepping abruptly from childhood to adulthood. In childhood boys and girls think essentially alike, and even at this growing-up crisis there is little difference unless it has been caused by different social training; fundamentally feminine and masculine views of life come only with maturity and adult experience. The technical problem of *The Yearling* was the most difficult—to present the phases or elements of the boy's life and at the same time to provide naturally an experience which should waken him into manhood. For the depiction of the whole life of the boy the year's cycle was necessary, and the swift push into manhood required the sacrifice of the thing which he loved best. Jody was created largely from the reminiscences of two old men.]

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## WHAT CAN SCHOLARSHIP DO FOR THE COLLEGE TEACHER?

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In this mad world of ours there are very few things of which I am sure. One is that the world *is* mad, or at least mad north-northwest. Another is that there is no simple answer to the question, What makes a good teacher? I admit that both facts are unfortunate and that my conviction in the latter instance may be the result of ignorance. Perhaps there are those who know the answer. I have not consulted the department of education, to which one naturally turns when in doubt on matters of this sort. There my colleagues may have a formula; but even if they have, I am tempted to remain in doubt. For my own observation tells me that there is no one mold or pattern into which all good teachers fit. When I call to mind the

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many good college teachers of English that I know—some of them supremely good—I am most impressed by the great diversity among them. They constitute, as it were, a series of complex fractions for which no common denominator can be found. And yet before I can attempt an answer to the question which has been set before me—What can scholarship do for the college teacher?—I must know what it is that we are looking for in college teachers, what makes a good college teacher good.

While there is apparently no common denominator, no single qualification to which effectiveness in the college teacher can be reduced, I seem to sense in the species certain elements which singly or in combination are often to be found. In theory all these elements are desirable; in practice it would seem that the presence of one or two to a sufficient degree is enough to bring success. And the success is not necessarily a partial one. I have known teachers who have been on friendly terms with their classes, have given their students something and brought out what was in them, and have exerted a generally beneficial influence without being in any sense ten-talent men or women. They are, it is fair to conclude, good teachers.

Of course, I should place high in the list of these essential elements a knowledge of the subject which one professes to teach. I cannot believe that one attains any kind of continued success if his teaching involves pretense. One who does not know his subject may fool some of his students, may fool them all at times, but he is sure to be found out eventually, and when he is, his influence is gone. His students must have confidence in him, and what is even more important, he must have confidence in himself. To face a class with the fear that the springs of knowledge may run dry before the end of the hour or the end of the course would make teaching a perpetual nightmare. One who does not know what he is talking about is sometimes unaware of the extent of his ignorance. He is in a happier state, although his bliss may be but small consolation to his class. A decent knowledge of one's subject, therefore, I put first as the most obvious of the requisites of a good teacher.

I put second, as equally obvious, the power of communication, the ability to impart one's knowledge to others. This seemingly simple process is in reality a highly complex problem in psychology and de-

pend in part upon factors which can almost be described as intuitive. The ability to size up the other person, to estimate accurately the extent of his previous knowledge, to discover the idea or the illustration that brings comprehension, is as important in college teaching as logical thinking and clear exposition. Some seem to have it instinctively, while others who are distinguished as scholars have been failures in the classroom. They seem unable to sense the undergraduate level, to come down from their own intellectual plane to that of younger minds. Possibly it is no more than a lack of imagination, or imagination supported by memory of the time when they found reasonably difficult the steps which they now take so easily. A teacher must never completely outgrow his youth; he must remain at least young in mind, if he is to teach the young. That is why it is good for every teacher to give a little elementary work as long as he can. It is the best way of keeping whatever power of simple communication he has.

I am inclined to put third on my short list of assets something that for want of a better name I will call "enthusiasm." It is a quality more often associated with young teachers, but the quality that I mean is not purely the prerogative of youth. Of course, in its simplest form enthusiasm is only the fresh interest which accompanies a new experience, an enjoyment not yet dulled by too much repetition. It is naturally found most often in the first few years of teaching, and I have seen young teachers who didn't have much more than their obviously genuine enjoyment in teaching what they knew to a class arouse a most gratifying response. As a result the class learned more than the teacher taught it, and, if asked, would have voted him a good teacher. It is well that this is so, or the lot of the beginner would be a hard one. But I mean more than this first flush of pleasure in a new experience, the hope and extra effort that carries us along when we are young. I mean also the ability to feel a continued stimulus in facing a class, the ability to respond to this stimulus with the desire to put one's ideas across. In this sense every class is a new experience. The teacher is like the actor who, no matter how many times he plays a part, is under the necessity of getting the desired response from his audience. The successful teacher feels the same challenge, and when teaching becomes mechanical, a matter of

routine, when the challenge is no longer there, I cannot believe that it will be really successful.

Last, I should list as an essential that vague thing that we call personality. I hasten to explain that I am not trying to fit all members of the profession into a type, whether of dress, manner, or temperament. I might almost say that I would consider satisfactory the personality of a teacher if it is free from serious handicaps. For example, he should not have a speech defect or unfortunate mannerisms. He should not affect singularity, as the Elizabethans put it. Excessive shyness or a too-retiring disposition are qualities which might well give a man pause before deciding on college teaching as a career. If he is always going to be uncomfortable before a class or in the presence of an audience, his place is probably somewhere else than on a lecture platform. But these are matters which I assume, are self-evident.

Now, my reason for this brief analysis is no doubt apparent. It is to make the point that of these elements which enter in varying degrees into the successful teacher there is only one over which the individual can exert much control. He cannot do much to alter the effects of heredity and environment. Enthusiasm is not a garment that can be put on at will. And even the power of clear and interesting presentation is probably as much a matter of natural endowment as of conscious discipline. But knowledge of his subject, thorough acquaintance with his field, abundance of information, breadth of view, and freshness of approach—these are things which in large measure he can command if he has the will to do so. They imply intellectual growth, a continual enrichment of the mind. There must be replenishment. One must continue to add water to a battery if it is to keep on discharging current. Sometimes we must completely recharge it. We cannot put it in the car and proceed to forget it, expecting the engine to run indefinitely on the initial store of energy. I believe the really good college teacher is under a similar necessity of keeping up his intellectual battery in order that it may deliver a full charge to successive generations of students.

What part can scholarship play in keeping up this charge? And what do we mean by scholarship? I take scholarship to mean participation in the scientific advance that is being made in one's field.



It is not a matter of courses and degrees. I have known people who took graduate courses for twenty years and were still innocent of anything that could be called scholarship. They had sucked up pre-digested information, but they absorbed no vitamins with it. They had remained passive, whereas the essence of scholarship is initiative, an active, self-starting interest, and a critical attitude toward theory, opinion, and dogma. It is the spirit of inquiry. It presupposes the desire to keep up with current knowledge. When this spirit leads to the actual extension of the bounds of current knowledge and finds expression in print we often call it research.

The physicists have familiarized us with the idea of an expanding universe. It is an essential concept also in any field of learning. The search for truth goes on ceaselessly and many ideas, some of venerable age, are constantly being replaced by views more in keeping with present-day knowledge. In the last hundred years we have taken great strides in every field which the mind of man busies itself with, and the advance continues with no apparent decrease of energy. It is as true of the field of literary studies as of any other. Our journals have a hard time keeping up with production, so great is the pressure on their space. And I think there has never been a time when so much good work was being published and so much was appearing that could enrich the college teacher's mind and give fresh inspiration to his teaching.

This enrichment may take the form of a truer understanding of the individual author or the individual work. It may also illuminate a whole period of literary history. The college teacher of English has a double task. He will endeavor to interpret the great intellectual and artistic products of the race, lead the student to distinguish what is fine in literature from what is meretricious, and, as the final goal, enlarge his enjoyment of books. But he will also be concerned with the history of literary forms and movements and changes in taste and convention, in short, with literary history as a part of the history of civilization. In all these aspects of his teaching invaluable direction and stimulus are being offered him by current scholarship.

I can only allude to a few typical cases. If he is teaching Chaucer, what a wealth of fresh ideas and suggestions will come to him from the reading of Manly's *Some New Light on Chaucer*, Karl Young's

"Troilus and Criseyde as Romance," or Miss Galway's "Chaucer's Sovereign Lady." In Spenser we have had much clarification of the poet's career in Ireland and a wealth of new interpretative comment on the *Faerie Queene*. There has been in recent years a veritable renaissance of Spenserian scholarship in America. One need only mention the new knowledge of Marlowe that we owe to Leslie Hotson, Mark Eccles, and Tucker Brooke. Does the college teacher teach Shakespeare? I would ask if he has read those wonderfully illuminating studies of Miss Spurgeon on Shakespeare's imagery. Does he interpret *Hamlet*? In the "mousetrap" scene does Claudius remain unmoved by the dumb show because the murder is a figment of Hamlet's imagination, as Greg suggests; or is it because he does not see the pantomime, being, as Dover Wilson believes, too busy talking to Gertrude and Polonius; or is he really disturbed, as W. W. Lawrence maintains, and cannot do anything about it without arousing suspicion? Miss Nicholson's studies in the widening scientific horizons of the seventeenth century, the articles on Milton of Grant McColley, William R. Parker, and others, and Harbage's work on the genesis of the Cavalier drama have put important aspects of this period in a new perspective. In the eighteenth century we can now interpret significant figures in the light of Colonel Isham's collection of "Boswell Papers" and the new contributions to our knowledge of Burke, Goldsmith, and others. What need is there to speak of *The Road to Xanadu*? And so one might go on. Literary studies have gone forward so vigorously in the present century that anyone who ignores them is in the position of an airplane pilot without a radio, a mariner without a compass.

I would not go so far as to suggest that every college teacher should be a steady contributor to scholarly journals and monograph series. Productive scholarship is a matter of temperament. It springs from a creative urge, differing in direction but not greatly in kind from the urge of the artist. Nevertheless, I would draw attention to the benefits which the individual derives from it, quite apart from the contribution he may make to science and learning. The process of mastering completely some aspect of a field, digesting the scholarly literature and seeking the evidence on which the answer to some question depends, has a stimulating effect which cannot easily

be produced in other ways. It creates interest and intensifies the enjoyment of learning. It acts as a catalytic agent on the mind and stimulates independent thought. It gives one a critical judgment in matters pertaining to one's special interest, and this critical sense is certain to carry over into neighboring fields. It changes the passive mind into an active intellect. And it gives one the pleasure which we all derive from getting into the game. So I would bring before the college teacher, especially at the beginning of his career, the benefits and the pleasure which can be his if there is in him that creative urge of which I have spoken and without which research is but a treadmill grind.

There is, then, undoubted satisfaction in playing the game one's self; but there is virtue also in being an interested spectator. If one does not contribute to the journals, one can still read them. And it seems to me such a natural thing to do that it hardly appears necessary to make a point of it. The chemist or the physicist would be a strange person if he did not keep informed on the developments in his science. Perhaps these developments are so fundamental and at times even revolutionary that not to know about them would make him ridiculous in the eyes of his fellows. But the ordinary businessman also feels that he must read the *Nation's Business* or some trade journal if he is not to make mistakes or miss opportunities that may mean dollars in his pocket. Even in his hobbies the average man takes pleasure in learning what others are doing with tastes similar to his. If he is an amateur photographer, he reads one of the photographic magazines; if he likes to work with his hands, he buys *Popular Mechanics*; if he is a collector, he subscribes to *Antiques* or *Stamps* or the *Print Collector's Quarterly*.

Yet I think it often happens that college teachers of English do not subscribe to and do not read with any regularity the journals that publish linguistic and literary research and review the important new books in English scholarship. I have speculated at times on why this should be so. It seems clear that they do not have the interest which the amateur photographer or the print collector has in his hobby. Presumably the college teacher has elected to teach English because he is interested in it. Does his interest extend no further than to the pleasures of reading? Does a professor of English

profess merely to like books? Assuredly there are many people who enjoy good literature and are widely read but who do not consider reading a profession. What is the purpose of all our graduate schools and degrees? I am afraid they supply at least a partial answer to our question. If their assumption is right, that literature is not only a source of delight but a worthy object of study, that the history of literature is as valid a learning as the history of painting or government in the understanding of man's development, some of this conception should carry over into the graduate student's later life. And if in many cases it doesn't, it may be that the idea has not been properly planted. Do we not give the student too much predigested information instead of encouraging him to forage for himself? I have been impressed with the fact that graduate students far along in their work are often at a loss if they are asked about a recent development in scholarship which they have not been directed to in class. I suppose we should insist on every graduate student's spending an hour or two a week in the library over the current journals in his field. Perhaps in this way we might form the browsing habit. It seems, however, that the student's own curiosity and professional interest in his subject would cause him to pick up *Modern Philology* or *PMLA* without being told. The fact is that it doesn't, and a valuable habit which might carry over into his life as a teacher is never formed.

How is one to retain his competence in his subject if he neither engages in research himself nor keeps abreast of the researches of others? New discoveries do not always find their way quickly into popular handbooks and even our "Cambridge Histories" get out of date. I have occasionally heard it said of such and such a teacher that he is still giving lectures which he wrote thirty years ago. I don't believe it. There is a limit beyond which one cannot endure even his own banality. However, if there were no other safeguard against our progressive desiccation, an active participation in the advances made in our field will do much to prevent it. It will keep us from falling behind our times. It will keep fresh our interest in our classes. It will give us the justifiable satisfaction that comes from knowing that we know what we are talking about, that we walk abreast of our colleagues in our chosen profession. That, as I see it, is what scholarship can do for the college teacher.



## RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ENGLISH TEACHER IN THE URBAN UNIVERSITY

WINFIELD H. ROGERS<sup>1</sup>

Your chairman has given me an opportunity to discuss a subject too complicated to be treated briefly. This is not a threat, but an excuse for the high selectivity of my discussion. Let me say at once that the responsibilities of the English teacher in the urban university are not unique. The teacher in the urban university merely feels more need of listening to the admonishments of mother experience, and, indeed, sometimes of submitting to the chastisement of father pedagogy.

These responsibilities we take upon us when we become teachers of English—responsibilities to our subject, to our students, and to our democracy. Yet the responsibilities of the teacher are always in some kind of ratio to his problems. Given certain students under certain conditions, problems multiply, decrease, intensify, or fall away. The teacher in the urban university has many special problems, nearly all acute.

First, he finds himself to some degree directly dependent upon his students. With one or two exceptions urban universities lack stable financial support. The pressure of finance is constant in curriculum planning, in determining teaching methods, and in maintaining standards.

Second, he finds himself confronted with classes that are incredibly heterogeneous. One class may have an age variation of from eighteen to eighty, variations in social background running the gamut from a red cap to the president's wife. In addition, he finds, be the front office ever so conscientious and vigilant, an equally heterogeneous group in intelligence and training. The teacher either is confused as to the proper approach and content or falls into cynical disregard for a certain percentage of the cash customers. The prob-

<sup>1</sup> Chairman of the English department of Cleveland College, the downtown college of Western Reserve University, who delivered this address before the College Section of the National Council of Teachers of English in New York, November, 1939.

lem is obvious—to whom shall he talk and for whom shall he make his assignments?

Third, the urban teacher in general works amid the trade marts. The students, with the exception of special interest groups, such as that which makes up a course in verse writing, are practical and pragmatic. Their motives are overwhelmingly vocational or professional.

In this incomplete statement of the problems of the urban teacher, those of a less degree of urbanity may recognize some that pertain to the rural regions of Columbus and Ithaca.

The teacher of English as a result of these three factors awakes one day—we hope not too late—to the fact that he is almost the last sad, benighted representative of the fine, vague, old phenomenon called the humanities. Art, philosophy, and classics have but a moribund existence; their places have been taken by dress design, vocational guidance, and commercial Spanish. History, prepared to save itself at all cost, straddles the fence, ready to jump down and gambol with the social sciences. The modern languages merely help students to fulfil a silly group requirement. English is left with a few redoubtable and some doubtful handmaidens: drama, comparative literature, and speech, for example.

Certain facts for all of us begin to emerge. If not the only humanity, we alone survive with some vitality, and for the time being are numerically strong (perhaps because we have the huge foundation of required English on and by which to build and justify our superstructure). Naturally we believe in our subject as a humanity; we willingly gird our pedantic loins for a fight to the finish. The Committee of Twenty-four of the M.L.A. and N.C.T.E. sends forth a manifesto to an unlistening and apathetic world to the effect that the individual needs us, democracy needs us, and humanity needs us. Without anathematizing the social sciences, we might see if the concluding sentence of our manifesto will do as an academic battle cry. It reads: "It is our duty as teachers to keep these aims clear in our own minds, constantly to improve our methods of realizing them, and, above all, to explain the importance of the intelligent study of literature to the world which sorely needs its direction and its illumination."

I fear not our aims. I do fear that, even with such an eloquent manifesto, we shall have difficulty in making our students listen to our explanation of the importance of the intelligent study of literature "to the world which sorely needs its direction and its illumination." I am left a little troubled as to exactly what these writers mean by the intelligent study of literature. Despite a sense of vagueness, we will not quarrel with the aim set forth by the committee—"rugged individualism on the plane of the spirit" and "richly endowed and self-reliant individuals." These can be granted, but the methods are another thing. The report here is almost entirely negative: make no frontal attack on beauty, do more than transmit facts and critical data, and nicely adjust material to the students. This leaves me rudderless in a foggy sea of terminology and methodology. For this reason I speak of our mutual problems arising out of our responsibilities to our students, our subject, and our democracy. I reiterate that the urban teacher perhaps is merely more urgently aware of the need of immediate solution.

If the world will not heed our manifesto, *we* must. Our responsibility to our students and to our subject can scarcely be differentiated. Primarily, it is honesty and square-dealing. Old-fashioned words, new wrought. We must put the student—in the urban university our cash customer—where he belongs and where he can understand; at great sacrifice we must create places where he belongs, if we don't have them now. I believe, for example, that there should be—with appropriate accrediting, of course, by which to soothe our academic conscience—at least three levels of Freshman English and maybe an equal number of Sophomore levels in the introductory literature course. The type of course offered students of different background, already formulated interest and ability should vary according to background, interest, and ability. This is honesty and square-dealing.

And, above all, let us talk honestly and squarely, if we can. And if we can't, let us learn. Let me explain. We English teachers are fraternity men using a kind of Babylonish dialect for communication among ourselves. A somewhat isolated fraternity, we will not see the reality of our position—in jeopardy; and in fact we reject the reality that confronts us. Honesty is, above all, concreteness that cannot be

expressed in our Babylonish dialect. The following words are from one of our fraternity, a Ph.D., a professor, and an intelligent man. "And to provide the kind of pleasure we demand from a piece of literature [biography] must be shaped and suffused, not by invention, but by a lively re-creative imagination and set forth in a satisfying artistic form." Now I wonder what this means to a group of Freshmen students. Nothing more is said about the "kind of pleasure we demand from a piece of literature," about this "shaping and suffusing," about this "invention"; and there is not even a contextual definition of "satisfying artistic form." The passage stands alone in a preface of a text apparently designed for Freshmen. It is unconsciously dishonest. If this is what we write—and it is—how much looser must be our talk to our classes! Methods using these tools are not going to preserve the humanities and perpetuate the study of literature. Such language fails to impress the student in the urban university. Our students are either sufficiently water-proofed to such statements, or they merely are stimulated by them to academic caricature. They have paid their own good money over the counter, or they are well aware of the sacrifices their parents are making. They demand more in return than our particular brand of doubletalk.

One young instructor described such a group to me last year. "When I started to talk, they stuck their jaws out. They're a bunch of yeggs. Their attitude was: 'Aw right now, just try to show us there's somethin' in this English stuff.'" This instructor loved it. The challenge was given, and he took it. He was realistic. He discovered that the only effective approach to style, for example, with such a group as this was a functional one. Neither dogmaticism nor appreciation was effective. With a functional approach, he soon had his class in a healthy mood of admiration for such occult things as unity, coherence, and emphasis in the composition, paragraph, and sentence. He was wise in rejecting the prescribed handbook and book of composition, with their formalized, nonfunctional and unphilosophical approach. His principal difficulty lay in explaining why he had asked them in the first instance to buy these unusable texts. I doubt if this man could have done so well in the following semester in which there is more literature. He couldn't have helped



but fall back on some of those high-sounding platitudes he had absorbed in *his* courses. One can scarcely be confronted with the difficult problems of the initial course in literature without relying upon some of the vaguely impressive language that one has been hearing for seven years or more.

Perhaps we can profitably listen to Swift's advice concerning language:

The first is the Frequency of flat unnecessary Epethets, and the other is the Folly of using old threadbare Phrases, which will often make you go out of your way to find and apply them, and which are nauseous to rational Hearers, and will seldom express your Meaning as well as your own natural Words . . . when a Man's Thoughts are clear the properest words will generally offer themselves first, and his own Judgement will direct him in what Order to place them, so they may best be understood. . . . In short, that Simplicity without which no human Performance can arrive to any great Perfection, is nowhere more eminently useful than is this.

An eloquent plea for us to throw off our academic and pedantic word-cloak.

The fact that we are too seldom equipped at the outset and too seldom attempt to make up the deficiency leaves us oblivious to our real responsibilities to our subject or causes us to take refuge in cynicism. Not long ago I was talking to a colleague about such matters. My interpretation of his attitude is that his lack of success in developing critical and interpretative power in his students had made him cynical. His general point of view was: "You make the analysis and then in examination ask the students about what you said, and about the characters and plot." The result of such an attitude is the reliance on cliché and literary fact, or on regurgitation!

The temper of our students calls for courage and honest thinking. We may feel that they are philistines, but they have a healthy independence of mind. The cowardice of teachers of English is notable. When confronted with current books, in the absence of hal-  
lowed judgments, they too frequently are baffled and bewildered. Established works, moreover, are all good, because established. Hawthorne is a classic, and thus we feel we must defend him on all scores—even as a humorist. A number of students recently showed considerable surprise on hearing, in answer to a question, that

Hawthorne's *Hepzibah* is a poor character, that at best Hawthorne as a humorist was arch, that as a serious-minded man Hawthorne could achieve only the self-consciously humorous. They were accustomed to having all classics uncritically defended on all scores.

To get away from jargon is very difficult. I have certainly realized this in the preparation of this paper, and I fear that I may not have completely escaped. Yet the attempt, I think, is worth while. For while we mouth our platitudinous jargon our students pass by our materials. And self-examination and accusation are rare and arduous. Yet we must become more genuinely and freshly analytical and critical. I have already cited an instance of betrayal, a bit of double-talking that I meant to be symptomatic. To illustrate again, are we fulfilling our responsibilities to our students and to our subject when we discuss Swift's style in the following way?

" 'Simplicity,' said Swift, 'is the best and truest ornament of most things in human life'; and Landor, commenting on Swift's style, observes that he never attempted to round his sentences by redundant words, aware that from the simplest and the fewest arise the secret springs of genuine harmony." We can easily grant absence of redundancy. In respect to "the simplest and fewest," I suspect that the critic is thinking of Swift's definition of style and of Landor's remark, rather than of Swift's actual style. Apparently the critic was speaking of *A Tale of a Tub*. Now with his words and Landor's in mind, listen to this *simple* sentence from *A Tale of a Tub*:

And whereas the mind of Man, when he gives the spur and bridle to his thoughts, doth never stop, but naturally sallies out into both extremes, of high and low, of good and evil; his first flight of fancy commonly transports him to ideas of what is most perfect, finished, and exalted; till, having soared out of his own reach and sight, not well perceiving how near the frontiers of height and depth border upon each other; with the same course and wing, he falls down plumb into the lowest bottom of things, like one who travels the east into the west, or like a straight line drawn by its own length into a circle.

Is this simple and unmetaphorical, as we hear Swift's style is? One needs only to open the pages of *A Tale* to discover how much we need training in literary analysis.

In my opinion our task is threefold, for I do not believe that any of us should be isolated in any place on the academic hierarchy.

Ideally, to know the realities of our professional problems, we should be constantly in touch with Freshmen, undergraduates, and graduates. When we start to teach we are not adequately trained to teach composition, to interpret texts, to direct graduate students. As a result most teachers learn the disciplines that they need as teachers after they presumably have been trained for their jobs, if they ever do become trained.

I am not advocating educational measures—teacher-training, in the narrow sense, or classroom management. Nor am I minimizing the importance of scholarship and scholarly training, for I believe that all university teaching must be built on sound scholarship.

Yet I reiterate, from our graduate schools to our beginning composition course we have ceased to be in contact with realities. I am afraid our graduate schools are to blame. They give scholarly discipline of a kind; and it may be argued that this discipline is conducive to a critical and analytic approach to language and literature. And it is true that in reaction to the objective tests of the educators, essay-type questions with a critical cast have assumed an important place in some institutions. Further, in a few institutions genuinely analytic courses have been introduced. And even in an insulated profession the writings of Chase, Huxley, Richards, Ogden, Upward, Lady Welby, Britton, Empey, and others must have some effect. Nonetheless, despite the value of the scholarly discipline, despite the sporadic attempts, despite the healthy influence of the semanticists, I see little in the way of concerted attempts to train ourselves and to train teachers in the discipline of analysis and criticism. The prevailing graduate discipline—in many instances, of course, splendid in its way—is in danger of being relegated to a small corner in the educational world. That is, unless this discipline, with its valuable philological, linguistic, bibliographical, and biographical fact can be integrated with a discipline that includes analysis, interpretation, and philosophy.

As far as I know, only one university in the country has attempted, at least in theory, to make the synthesis or integration of these disciplines. From the B.A. examinations to the Ph.D., the University of Chicago gives an admirable emphasis, no matter what our opinion of the educational theories of Robert Hutchins. Although

plenty of biographical and historical information is demanded, the examinations, as you know, emphasize criticism and the analysis of ideas. To this is added for the Master's degree an examination in English grammar from both the analytical and the historical points of view. The strenuous discipline for the doctorate includes examinations on reading and history, on techniques and tools of research, on linguistics, on and in criticism, on the analysis of ideas. What is notable is the emphasis on power.

From the response of students to Chicago, I gather that a great many of them see sense in such a program, even allowing *one* institution of higher learning to dispense with a football team. In my opinion students are remarkably sensitive in recognizing an educational philosophy and plan. The Chicago way may not be *the* way; it is nevertheless of great significance as the only concerted, rationalized discipline of its kind.

I am one of those who have felt the need for retraining myself for my job. At least I feel that I have commenced. As a matter of fact, once we have conquered our own jargon, the fight is half won. For our jargon is largely a mark of our lack of thought and of our patterned emotional reactions. Let me say that I am continually struck by the fact that many critics and scholars seem not to have read the works they discuss; the analyses of Richards, for example, give us our cue. And, as I have said, when we hear that Swift has a straightforward, simple style, we wonder if the critic is looking at Swift's definition of style or at his highly metaphorical expression. The moment we get away from conventional expression and analysis we are in trouble. The only trouble shooter available, then, is our own intelligence and training, if we are not already too lazy. Energy and honesty, on the other hand, will do much.

The world over, certain things are being demanded of education by educators. The Englishman Lancelot Hogben, for example, recently wrote that "there is need for far reaching reformation in the content of education to endow the pursuit of knowledge with a *new sense of social relevance*." Our customers are cash customers, more and more demanding honest return for the investment. We are sure enough of the validity of our materials. We must meet the attack and the current emphasis on the social sciences and the demands of



our cash customers by introducing into our teaching and criticism not only this new sense of social relevance but, above all, a new sense of personal relevance. This relevance cannot be achieved by mouthing platitudes. A careful definition of all terms, for instance, leads us to a new sense of integrity that is communicated to our listeners. Much can be accomplished by imparting a new sense of personal relevance through our language. Furthermore, if the critical and philosophical emphasis will not lead unwilling and unfit horses, it will give even them a respect for us—a respect which at present I am afraid we don't enjoy. In our attempt to impart this sense of personal relevance, literary history *per se* must be abandoned in the initial stages; new and fresh techniques of analysis must be introduced.

There has been much right emphasis lately on the importance of language in a democracy. Propaganda analysis is a popular indoor sport at the present time. Certainly, in a democracy words become incredibly important. Jargon, of which our Babylonish dialect is one kind, is the weapon of the demagogue. Our responsibility is to recognize our own jargon before passing on the jargon of others. Woolly thinking, fuzzy styles, must be dealt with by men who themselves are not woolly and fuzzy. Stuart Chase recently wrote: "Persons who set themselves up as writers and word dealers have a special responsibility in the power age. If they cannot be trusted to talk honestly, who can be trusted?"

A democracy under present world-conditions cannot survive without persons who can read and write—read and write accurately as a mirror of intellectual integrity—and who have the humane values of tolerance, understanding, and sympathy. In a society organized quantitatively it is of paramount importance that we cultivate quality and the recognition of quality. It is our responsibility whether we function in the urban university or in the most secluded New England college. For this reason I say we must look to our training, to our language, to the methods and content of our courses. Many have spoken of the necessity of the Ivory Tower—a necessity, indeed—but we must have some real contact with the world below if we wish to maintain true cultural values and if we wish our institutions and our subject to achieve their potential cultural significance.

## WHO SHOULD TEACH ENGLISH?

BLANCHE COLTON WILLIAMS<sup>1</sup>

Who should teach English? "Only the properly qualified" might answer the question but for the immediate challenge, "Who is properly qualified?" followed by "Qualified to teach specifically what?" or "What constitutes college English?"

Because there is academic lightning and thunder and earthquake today, college English will be different tomorrow; it may lose individual entity, merging with other subjects of the curriculum in one common aim which, in the hope of reformers, will produce a man or woman adjusted to the changed and changing world. English teachers have been accused of setting free the incapable and the mal-adjusted.

In the current *Sewanee Review*, in an article titled "Professor's Confession," pseudonymous Cade Witherspoon observes through sardonic eyes the plight of the English teacher as perhaps most of us see it. This man is struggling with the machinery of reform as complicated, says Mr. Witherspoon, as a system of holding companies. "An administrative-faculty steering committee is appointed, sometimes self-appointed, to formulate a program of study and to assign the rest of the faculty to sub-committees. It is composed of people known to have the 'right' attitude toward the problems of higher education, and is occasionally augmented by the presence of an 'expert' drawn from the faculty of an institution which has already demonstrated its avidity for experiment and 'vision.'"

It is clear that if department lines vanish, not the same well-qualified teacher will be necessary. Anybody, everybody will teach English, or try to teach it, or not even try. Even if the English staff remains, the professor will have little time left for teaching. Let him assert that he wishes small part in the government; he wishes to teach; he may asseverate in vain; he will be informed that in a

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Williams has just retired from the headship of the English department of Hunter College and will devote herself to editing and writing. Among her books are *A Handbook on Story Writing*, *Gnomic Poetry in Anglo-Saxon*, *Do You Know English Literature?* (with John Macy), *O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories* (edited; annually fourteen years, 1919-32), *George Eliot: A Biography*.

democratic organization he must do his part, and this "must" is the crack of a whip in the hands of leaders.

In Mr. Witherspoon's words, again, the professor "studies, writes theses, and makes reports; first in committee, then in faculty meeting, which now meets twice or thrice weekly when in old days one meeting was more than enough." With this dubiously amused gentleman, many know that not to seem illiterate the professor learns to talk about the new dispensation. "Synthesis," "integration," "integrated personalities," "genuine interest," he sprinkles judiciously throughout the lingo necessitated by reform, recognizing that the word "curriculum" as long known is becoming, if not already become, obsolete.

Though the professor may abolish recitations and examinations because the student is not "genuinely interested," though aware that life and living are obvious goals, yet he remains convinced that he is a teacher of English and by his contribution may help toward the goal. (I sum up briefly.)

Whether we are to follow bolshevism or, Heaven forbid, some other ism foisted upon the basis of our American heritage, who knows? One fact faces us: the renovated meaning of democracy, flattering to none who accepts it, has already brought cataclysmic changes to the old order; and it will bring more, in education as elsewhere, before inevitable subsidence. After death in the trenches current vigorous men and women will be missing; after devastation, the very young and inexperienced will do the work of reconstruction.

Let us emerge from the preliminaries, made that the position of this speaker may be free from the criticism that she has been buried under stampeding herds and does not know she is dead. She has referred to Cade Witherspoon's article because it substantiates experiences and observations of her own, illustrations of which, for reasons, are honored not in the observance but in the breach. The chief reason is that she has resigned from the complicated mechanics of the academic world, substituting for it the simpler mechanism of the type machine. Let us, then, get on.

At the moment, logic and experience still confirm the teaching of a trinity made up of the language, or tool; composition, or use of the tool; literature, or the achievements by masters of the tool. Ob-

viously, not all can instruct so well in every division, but frequently in nonideal circumstances any college teacher of English is ready and even eager to lend a mind to more than one.

Because, to feed English, whose father and mother are Anglo-Saxon and French, though we have not been at a feast of languages and stolen the scraps but have behaved, rather, like the famous poet who "went and took what he required," we have today the most cosmopolitan descendant of all speech, a growing hybrid, powerful and beautiful. To teach this language a foreign scholar may serve as well as or better than one born to the vernacular, always with the provision that he has made English his supreme study. This linguist, native or foreign, has at command the Romance and the Germanic tongues as well as ancient Latin; has an acquaintance with Greek and, to some extent, with the oldest Indo-Iranian. The European scholar, I think we shall agree, swims more freely in the salty sea of his subject, and dives with less peril in searching for authentic treasure of fossil poetry. Even so, most Americans prefer the American scholar who knows his country, appreciates development and change, and forecasts demands of the future; in short, he contributes more to the life of the student. I should like to add that through fourteen years of department headship, I chose always the American; we have used texts, further, by members of our department and by other American scholars.

Chiefly, the professor of language, interested in the origin and growth of words, changing usage and individual usage constituting the basis of style or personality, must have dynamite on the brain. He needs it for shocking his class into similar interest. He needs, also, some of the requirements noticed hereafter.

To teach composition, by far the most important division of the English trinity, if students are rightly considered, the college should have the greatest specialist money can bring, not the man or woman who believes "anybody can teach it." Instructors fretting away years in the reading of papers too frequently regard composition as elementary, as drudgery, believing that literature is more easily taught and (by a deplorable *non sequitur*) is, at the same time, the apex of the course. The applying teacher agrees gladly to teach composition, but after a year—possibly two or three years—wonders



audibly whether he may not have a section of literature. Possibly his classes have been too heavy; possibly so-called "required composition" has packed before his hopeful eyes a room of boys and girls more inept than he had dreamed could get into college. Having his class in literature, he demands another and another, argues that "comp" should be left to the underling, to the newcomer that once he was, or to those advanced instructors who, by proved ability in evoking publishable essays and readable short stories, may, of course, teach upperclassmen without loss of dignity!

This procedure is basically wrong and all because the teacher is not one essentially of composition, or does not rate correctly its importance. Of the genus "English professor," the composition teacher is a distinct species. His intention and desire are to help students express themselves in written English and through expression to live more largely in at least cubical dimensions. His main asset is a lively interest in current publications. He believes in today's journalism, in the amazingly well-written leaders in leading newspapers. He does not forget that prose of other years descends from men who expressed themselves for their day, descends because still pertinent or admirable or entertaining. He does not scorn so-called business English, thoroughly aware that his students are ravenous for the provender he gives them, aware that houses of illustrious business employ writers who know how to write and he, by all the gods of English, will see to it his graduates can write, at least, a correct business letter.

Alertness to changing style, the result of changing life; appreciation of vitality; accuracy and spontaneity in his own word hoard; a sense of humor; an eye on the flying ball that is the student—with a pretty sound prophecy of its ultimate landing place—finding the spirit back of each face, and freeing that spirit to grow through expression—these are indispensable. He can be described completely only by descending the alphabet many times; but lists are tiresome. They may be found on blanks sent to applicants by department heads; they may be found on the rating list of superintendents. But for the mere *A B C*, he should not be anarchist, bolshevist, communist. Not yet, please the English gods! He is an American, brave, courageous. This teacher has perfect eyes and ears, exhaustless en-

ergy, bounding health, a disciplined voice. He is able to read like chain lightning, with absolute concentration, thousands of words daily, able to check as he reads errors in detail, able to hold in mind the form or entire pattern. He will demand and he will get the best, rejecting what he knows to be, at first glance, nonacceptable script and mechanics. Every paper he reads springs from life; he himself is not dead but alive. What avails "sp." "dic." or "s.s." on the margin? He is destructive only to be constructive; for example, he shows by re-writing the particular part criticized how the meaning may shine through more clearly or strongly. He makes a general comment and wastes few hours in so-called "conferences," but lays upon the student the burden of seeking a conference.

He has a prodigious memory, not only for apt illustration drawn from his own treasure chest but for keeping in mind the progress or regress of a hundred students. He is "out" with William and Archibald if he refers to Archie's essay which was, in fact, Bill's. He is not pompous but modest; he does not talk down, but contrives to let the students feel that although somewhat beyond them, he is growing with them. In a large group of instructors, he is loyal to them and to his classes. Loyalty is apparently difficult of attainment: a slantwise remark or the quirk of an eyebrow can divide a student body into adherents of Professor X. versus Professor Z. Full of grace and sweetness and strength, without jealousy, he maintains loyalty if not approval. Tact, resourcefulness, fairness, honesty, judgment, self-control—but this list again approaches the alphabetic description.

Preferably, this teacher should not have lost time in seeking the doctorate degree, unless he has progressed toward that degree through the realms of literature chiefly in the last three centuries; and if he has picked up the degree on his way, he should know its possession means little in his work. He cannot use it as a staff: it will fail him. He wears it more lightly than a flower and smiles now and then at the little adornment. To earn the doctorate, he has submitted an original opus in lieu of the outworn sort of thesis originating in Germany many years ago, an original contribution properly appraised and approved by discriminating judges, published by a reputable press. Any English department, rather than demanding the higher degree, should set a competitive examination to catch the man most desired.

He who writes and likes to write is the most inspiring guide. Nor has this statement any intention of being confused with the doubtful dictum that best writers are best instructors in writing. To the writer his job, to the teacher his. A few notable exceptions cheer: Mary Ellen Chase, for example, who will not give up her Freshman composition.

The supreme teacher of composition has what Thomas Wentworth Higginson demanded of the lyric poet: "energy, ardor, depth of thought, and a vast amount of oxygen in his style." He uses fearless diction. He swims in the sea of English; if powerful, with Carlylean strokes; if serenely impassioned, floating in an enchanted boat on the waves of sweet English. He can express only what he is: if petty and mean, he expresses himself; if gracious and generous, he expresses himself. Whatever he is, he bosses his diction and is not bossed by it. English is a nettle that stings the timid hand; it is grasped firmly by him who makes it obedient to purpose.

This model instructor knows that fluency is not long-windedness, not the indulgence in triads practiced by Tarkington's Mr. Kinoslign: "Youth should frolic, should be sprightly; it should run and leap; . . . no cigar, no cigarette, no cheroot; . . . verses, rhymes, lines metrical and cadenced . . ." and so on interminably.

He knows that correct idiom has no truck with that careful spacing by the old-fashioned dame-schoolteacher, who separates every word from the preceding, never gliding, never eliding, setting the heel of each syllable into the aching ears of her audience. "Drasty speech!" He wastes no time in discussing small moot points. "Shall I use shall or will?" He gives the answer, not misled into an hour's discussion, and lets these yapping terriers lie. He is not averse to slang but does not wallow in it.

Instead of student themes, he does not read aloud by the hour something irrelevant and immaterial, often his own compositions—preferably verse. He speaks discreetly of his own labors by way of illustration, not trying the results before the class to see what they think. They may think, but they will not tell him. The self-exploiter suggested is an artistic soul who wears a blue tie to match his eyes, or a red tie not to match the rims but the red-covered book in his hands.

He is not an Anglophobe, knowing less British-English than the average teacher, who is aware that American speech is a Banyan tree

bough long rooted, larger than the parent trunk. The chappie who remarks that he has been to the libry to get his shedule and has also brought up a dictionry may ref er, in a burst of pure and delightful ignorance, to a new book by Miss Chol-mon-de-ley of Cir-in-ces-ter.

Above all, he does not tie up composition with literature in making assignments. If the survey course sufferers must write immaturly mature essays on Chaucer or Shakespeare or Sir Thomas Browne, why load such burdens on writing classes? Life is their province, through which they are guided in observation, thought, originality, and joy in expressing life.

He does not permit himself to become a drudge: if classes are too large and he can do nothing to reduce numbers, he cuts assignments. His class hour is worthless if he is weary unto death, worthless also if he takes up listlessly a few papers dated a month back and "corrected" by a "reader."

Dr. Frederick Houck Law was cited the other day as saying the English curriculum offers best opportunity for character building; and this statement connotes for every honest teacher building Americans, not Nazis or others.

Down in the Everglades a month or so ago, I was with a motor party one of whom wanted to buy a raccoon. We tried at the first Indian shack. "No!" grunted the relic of former Continental owners. A few miles farther along, we asked an Indian woman. "Humph!" she snorted with negative inflection, "'Gator, yes." We wanted no alligators. We dropped in at the trading post of Osceola's grandson. "Sorry," replied that laconic Seminole. On we flew past paradises of fauna and flora to the last cabin. "Any chodas?" our lady called out. "Heaps!" yelled back the proprietor. The coon-craving lady went in and was offered soda water. After hearing her explanation that she wanted a coon, a choda, not a bottle of pop, the red man sadly shook his head: "Lady, there ain't hardly no more of 'em."

Conclusions through a suggested parallel would be false: we have many praiseworthy composition instructors, working under adverse conditions; we have not a few illustrious examples. With one fell blow, let us overturn or smash any ideal figure possibly limned here. We may even pedestal the seemingly inadequate man or woman. If



the teacher gets results; if he obtains the will of his class to write decently; if he helps toward something better—he is doing a good job. If he gladly learns and gladly teaches, though never great, he is at least worthy. If, further, the teacher has everything I have mentioned as desirable, not many of him would be with us. He would be with big business, such as the movies. And there's the rub.

And so we arrive at the professor of literature, whom I shall dismiss briefly. For the entire survey or for a single period of our illustriousness, say the Elizabethan or the Romantic, he has knowledge at least encyclopedic. He does not read names and dates and lists of works, requiring his class to learn them. If he does, he crams with dry husks; the grain is stored in some unapproachable bin. He creates new lectures every year. If he does not, he is aptly hit off in a skit to be found in the *News Letter* of the College English Association for October, 1939, reprinted from the *Oxford Magazine*:

#### AD LECTIONEM SUAM

When autumn's winds denude the grove,  
I seek my lecture where it lurks.  
'Mid the unpublished portion of my works.

And ponder, while its sheets I scan,  
How many years away have slipt  
Since first I penned that ancient manuscript.

Though Truth enlarge her widening range,  
And knowledge be with time increased,  
Yet thou, my Lecture, does not change  
The least.

But fixed immutable amidst  
The advent of a newer lore  
Maintainest calmly what thou didst  
Before.

Once more for intellectual food  
Thou'lt serve: an added phrase or two  
Will make thee really just as good  
As new.

This professor has not only a deep knowledge of English literature but a wide acquaintance with other literatures. He has understand-

ing, artistic appreciation, unprejudiced estimates of poetry and prose. He balances tentative conclusions, placing the author among immortals, relates him to preceding and future ages, and causes the class to ask: "What does this man's personality mean to me?" He has a glowing imagination that explores the past, lighting up cause and effect for the generation knowing not that now and tomorrow grow out of yesterday. He believes all eras, whether of growth or decadence, are conditioned by and condition following eras.

He rides no hobbies: if he thinks Bacon was Shakespeare, let him think so, but sweep him out of the classroom. If he sees all literature only in terms of the exploded Freudian theory, send him to a retreat for restoration of health; if he sees it as propaganda, send him to a concentration camp. If he believes English literature should be taught by the departments of sociology and education, lead him out to the Lord High Executioner. If he incites boys and girls to run to the nearest bookstore or library, let us multiply him by the thousands.

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### ENGLAND'S RELIGIOUS-DRAMA MOVEMENT

GEORGE R. KERNODLE<sup>1</sup>

The decade of world-wide economic depression which led to Hitler, Munich, and war had very different effects on the theater in England and in America. While New York saw one strong play after another dealing with contemporary economic problems or with the threat of war, you would never have suspected from the regular plays of the West End in London that jobs were scarce or that England's benevolent leadership of the world had any rival. Outside the London theater door, before the queues and lobbies, the unemployed sang or peddled matches, but inside, the audience saw only the ingenious machinations of Dr. Clitterhouse, the suburban antics of *George and Margaret*, or the nostalgic yearnings of *Dear Octopus*. Except for the cup-and-saucer realism of *Love on the Dole* and a few scenes of Shaw, there was no indication that the 1930's had any pressing social prob-

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lems. Concern about war was left to the overwrought adolescent in *Robert's Wife*. Only the recent *Geneva* of Shaw and *The Ascent of F6* by Auden and Isherwood showed any willingness to put international affairs on the stage.

In contrast to America the new creative force of English playwriting in the past decade has been directed into religious plays. While the established playwrights went on writing pleasant chatter and did not even follow up the vein of patriotism and English history opened up by Coward in *Cavalcade*, the newer writers either joined the poets of "The Group" and the Mercury Theater, or they wrote for the rapidly growing movement in religious drama. Although they have turned away from the disturbing problems of unemployment and German expansion, the writers of religious plays have found vital themes in man's relation to evil and to destiny and have developed some vigorous new forms. On religious themes they have written the best plays England has seen since Shaw, Barrie, and Galsworthy dominated the stage.

In a single decade the religious drama has become a major activity of the churches. The summer festivals at Canterbury and Tewkesbury have attracted large numbers of people who were not regular theatergoers. When *Murder in the Cathedral*, *Tobias and the Angel*, and *The Zeal of Thy House* had long commercial runs in London and on the road, even the West End ticket agencies realized that a revolution had taken place in the theater.

Like many other revolutions in the theater, the religious-drama movement broke away from the routine of the professional theater by seeking new authors, new actors, and a new audience. In and around church buildings it found new and beautiful settings. Even when it used theater buildings it attracted a large and eager audience of people who were not interested in the usual round of thrillers and trivial social comedies. Because its directors, its actors, and its audience wanted the finest plays they could get, it has attracted some of the best work of T. S. Eliot, John Masefield, Dorothy Sayers, Gordon Bottomley, and other writers who had established reputations in other forms of literature but had not been identified with the regular theater. Its most significant playwrights have broken away from naturalism and have borrowed from Greek and medieval drama,

from church ritual, from music and art traditions, or from methods suggested by the choral speech and mime movements so active in England, to mold a new drama that has fresh power of form, as well as vigor of content. With a wide sweep the movement has had amateur actors in village school and church performances and, in the London and important festival productions, some of the best professionals. It has itself developed a number of skilled actors, directors, and writers.

For years separate church groups and community theaters—notably Nugent Monk's Maddermarket Theatre at Norwich—had produced some religious plays. Just ten years ago the very successful *Joyous Pageant of the Nativity* moved into the Chelsea Palace Theatre, a vaudeville house, for matinee performances during December. The author, Charles A. Claye, had arranged with a parish group at St. Mary's, Graham Street, Chelsea, a pageant based on the religious paintings of the Italian Renaissance, especially those of Gentile da Fabriano, Botticelli, and Fra Angelico. To the accompaniment of music adapted from traditional carols and chants and from seventeenth and eighteenth century composers was enacted the story of the Nativity, from the childhood of Mary and the Annunciation to the return from Egypt. Every year since then, though there is no advertising, the December performances have been sold out weeks in advance.

The organized development of the movement started just over a decade ago when important officials of the Church of England began to promote the production of drama in the church buildings themselves. Although modern drama was born in the medieval church, yet, since it escaped in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there have been extremely few plays that churchmen were willing to have anything to do with, much less allow within the holy grounds. Thus the leadership of some of the bishops in the promotion of drama and the production of plays inside the cathedrals has had great influence all over England.

The churchman who has been of greatest importance is George Bell, now the bishop of Chichester. In 1928, while dean of Canterbury, he persuaded John Masefield to write *The Coming of Christ*, which was performed in Canterbury Cathedral Whitmonday and



Tuesday, May 28 and 29, of that year. Soon after that he became bishop of Chichester and in 1930 was able to establish the position of director of Religious Drama in his diocese. To fill that place he persuaded E. Martin Browne to return from America. In the drama department of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, where he taught, and in work for various church groups in Pittsburgh, Mr. Browne had devoted himself to the production of religious plays.

The movement was started with both enthusiasm and skill. The bishop's influence and Mr. Browne's activities soon extended beyond the diocese of Chichester. Amateur groups all over England needed direction and advice. The summer festivals were becoming important, and the better festival plays were ready for professional production in London and on the road. The Religious Drama Society, first organized in 1929, was expanded a year ago to meet these needs. With Mr. Browne as director it became the center for both amateur and professional production of religious plays for the whole country.

In the professional theater the society became increasingly active. It promoted the road tour of *Murder in the Cathedral* after its run of a year at the little Mercury Theatre and of four months at a regular West End theater. The tour was a great success, and last year the society sent out on tour Dorothy Sayers' *The Zeal of Thy House*—with no less success. With the Catholic Stage Guild it also produced *Sanctity* by Violet Clifton for special Sunday evening and matinee performances.

It has been by building up a wide amateur activity that the society has made its greatest success. Its amateur clientele has made possible large audiences for the professional and festival productions, and from the local groups have been developed a number of skilled actors, directors, and playwrights. To these groups the society has offered a number of services. Since the finding of suitable plays has been one of their hardest problems, the society set up in London a distributing center, selling and renting copies, recommending plays for particular occasions, arranging old plays, and persuading authors to write new ones. Last year several fieldworkers were sent out to give demonstrations and to help with organization and promotion. Not only church and Sunday-school groups but many teachers in

public schools responded, and a beginning was made in the elementary schools. In several cities conferences of leaders were held by the fieldworkers, and in London special two-week courses were given for directors and organizers.

In its educational courses for schools the British Broadcasting Company included dramatizations of Bible stories. Last year at Christmas and Easter and on other occasions productions from various church groups were put on the air, as well as religious plays written especially for the radio by Dorothy Sayers and others.

The year between Munich and Danzig may have brought forth little of interest from the established professional playwrights of London. But it saw the culmination of a decade of religious drama activity all over England and the establishment of the Religious Drama Society as a leading influence in both amateur and professional production.

Like our own *Green Pastures*, a number of the new plays in England bring to life the old stories and themes of the church by giving them a local habitation and name. The most striking of these have been the little plays by Sheila Kaye-Smith which she calls *Saints in Sussex*. Following the practice of most medieval drama and art, she resets the Bible characters in contemporary clothes and in the local dialect of Sussex. For instance, she dramatizes the birth of Jesus near a well-known inn in Sussex. The local shepherds come to admire him, and even some wise men from far-off Oxford and Cambridge come to pay homage. Other plays, without retelling the exact story, bring alive characters or incidents from the Bible. Some of them are like the well-known American play *Dust of the Road*, which gives Judas the task each year of helping someone in trouble. These plays emphasize the real, the local, and the timely.

Other plays—and these seem to point to more possibilities in the future—leave realism and seek more universal, more timeless effects by emphasizing the ritualistic and theological aspects of worship. The relation of man to God or to His archangels (since God may not be represented on the professional stage in England) and the expression of man's terrors and hopes through song, through ritual, through prayer, through sermons, have led to some extremely interesting developments. Contact with church ritual and church music gives the

drama an enormous fund of artistic material that it has lacked or neglected since the Middle Ages. Today with the resources of the choral-speech movement and modern dance and mime movements, it has, as it has not had since the Greeks, actors trained for the dramatic chorus and an audience ready to appreciate it.

From France the movement has borrowed a number of fine plays. Although France has had no such organized promotion of dramatic productions for church and festival occasions as England, several contemporary authors have treated religious themes in dramatic form. Paul Claudel's *The Tidings Brought to Mary* was translated into English a number of years ago and has been produced in America by the Theatre Guild and by many little-theater groups. More recently Henri Ghéon has become a leader and a revolutionary force in the French theater not only for his treatment of religious themes but also for his experiments in stylized and conventionalized forms that make use of poetry, music, dance movement, and ritualistic patterns. His plays *The Comedian*, *The Marriage of St. Francis*, and *St. Bernard* have been produced by religious groups in England. His most recently translated play, *The Way of the Cross*, is a short but very powerful dramatization of the emotions and the significance of the Crucifixion expressed in the movement and speech of a group of ordinary people watching and taking part in the procession to Calvary. Producing groups interested in powerful speech and mime possibilities as well as those interested in religious significance will find this play ideal.

Within the English religious-drama groups a number of young authors of varying ability have come forward. Among them one person who stands out for the development she has made and the promise she shows is Margaret Cropper. Her plays are especially interesting because she has gradually worked out some new dramatic forms which have much in common with those achieved by T. S. Eliot, Henri Ghéon, Dorothy Sayers, and others—forms which are coming to be characteristic of many of the better plays of the movement.

Especially in Miss Cropper's case we wonder to what extent the new forms have been due to the legal ruling of the British government that no impersonation of God or Jesus may be shown on the

stage and to what extent they have been due to the discovery or the intuitive realization that dramatic art, like other arts, gains more power by indirect than by direct representation. Whatever the reason, Miss Cropper has been interested in telling the story of Christ by showing the effect Christ had on others. In her full-length play *Christ Crucified*, without showing Christ himself she tells the story of the Passion, partly through Mary Magdalene, Martha, the Virgin, and the disciples and partly by means of the angels who watch the events and describe them to us. Their account, written in good dramatic poetry, gives us a more aesthetically developed impression of the events than a direct dramatization could have given. As in Ghéon's *The Way of the Cross*, the impassioned, formalized dialogue becomes a ritualistic re-enactment of the event. Not only has a way been discovered to surmount the objections of the Lord Chamberlain's office, but ways have been discovered or, rather, old ways have been rediscovered, to present drama through the semi-lyric development of dialogue or choral speech.

A more unified and more perfect use of the same form of drama is in Miss Cropper's more recent short play *Nativity with Angels*. An archangel with four angels comes to prepare the stable and the manger. Mary and Joseph arrive, the angels spread their wings over the Nativity, and we join in the adoration of the Christ child. But the whole drama is presented in the movement, dialogue, and choral refrains of the angels. Less profound than Ghéon's play, it is more charming and is no less a little masterpiece than his. As it presents no great difficulties in production and offers an excellent expression for pleasing voices and deep sincerity, I predict that it will be seen in every girls' school in America.

The high points of the English religious drama have been the plays of the festivals of Canterbury and Tewkesbury. While some have been chosen from plays already written—as James Bridie's *Tobias and the Angel* and *Jonah and the Whale* and Barrie's *The Boy David*, all produced at Tewkesbury, and Christopher Hassell's *Christ's Comet*, given at Canterbury—most of the plays have been written directly for festival performance, in conference with the director and workers. Thus have been created T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), Charles Williams' *Thomas Cranmer* (1936), and Dorothy



Sayers' *The Zeal of Thy House* (1937) and *The Devil To Pay* (1939)—all at Canterbury; and Mr. Browne and Christopher Fry created a pageant drama, *The Tower*, for Tewkesbury in July, 1939.

For *The Tower* Christopher Fry wrote some very effective choruses. When a casual modern woman traveler comes to the great Norman doorway of Tewkesbury Abbey, her remarks awaken the men and women of all ages, who give a choral commentary on the re-enactment of scenes in the history of the abbey. Sometimes as individual voices, sometimes as two or three groups of harmonizing voices answering one another antiphonally, sometimes as a mighty chorus, this choral group of five men and five women gives a lyric utterance to the emotions of the scenes and lift them to universal significance. Mr. Fry, like T. S. Eliot, Gordon Bottomley, and others, has found the tradition of choral speech developed by Marjorie Gullan and her disciples to be a supple and powerful medium for dramatic expression.

When T. S. Eliot was occupied with expressing the emptiness and futility of the life of the 1920's, he had some interest in dramatic form. Indeed, many passages of "The Waste Land" and other poems took the form of a choral commentary on a drama, the text of which he omitted. In "Sweeney Agonistes" he wrote a travesty of classic drama to express the travesty that is modern life. As his religious feelings deepened in the 1930's, he again turned to the dramatic form, this time with a sincere desire to learn to write for actual production. *The Rock* was his first play, written on a scenario of E. Martin Browne, for the diocese of London to use in its building campaign. Next followed his *Murder in the Cathedral*, written again in consultation with E. Martin Browne, for the Canterbury festival of June, 1935. Its run of more than a year in London and its sold-out houses in New York, as well as a long English tour and many productions in little theaters, attest its theatrical effectiveness. Such success has come as a great surprise to those who, fond of Eliot's verse, were aware of its difficulties and of its limited appeal. Many liked *Murder in the Cathedral* in performance who had not been drawn to Eliot's nondramatic poetry.

Many Americans are already familiar with *Murder in the Cathedral*. The chorus, the soliloquy, the sermon, the tempters who dra-

matize the conflicts inside the archbishop's mind, the knights who break through the dramatic wall to speak directly to the audience—these devices, as well as the vivid, striking language of Eliot, have already made an impression on both sides of the Atlantic. No less interesting in their methods are the other plays written for the Canterbury festival: the plays of Charles Williams and Dorothy Sayers.

In 1936 Charles Williams wrote *Thomas Cranmer*. It, again, is interesting not only for some effective dramatic verse but also for its theatrical technique. Williams not only uses a chorus and plays with the passage of time as easily as Thornton Wilder or a medieval playwright, but he creates a dominating figure, the Skeleton, to act as master of ceremonies and manipulate the characters almost as a puppetmaster, making comments, smiling ironically, now standing aside, now taking part in the play. He represents Time, Destiny, and finally Death. Under the scrutiny of the Skeleton, Cranmer struggles to keep his integrity through the fast-moving events from the time Henry VIII invoked his aid in making Anne Boleyn queen, through the religious struggles of Edward's years, to the ascent of Mary, when, after recanting, he was put to death. The allegorical treatment of history through such characters as Priest and Preacher, Commons and Lord, in some ways reminiscent of medieval morality plays, is very effective and holds many new possibilities for the modern playwright.

Dorothy Sayers has written the neatest, the most compact, and the most dramatically effective play. Her *The Zeal of Thy House*, produced at Canterbury in June, 1937, and later in London, had a very successful tour of England last year. Making use of the forms and methods already tried out by Miss Cropper and others, she has been less experimental than Eliot or Williams and has brought the few forms she uses to a more harmonious perfection. If she lacks Eliot's ear and his marvelous gift of poetic imagery, she has a surer visual sense. In this play her theme is worked out completely in dramatic action, while Eliot depends more on the rich fabric of his words.

Like many other plays of the movement, *The Zeal of Thy House* makes use of two planes of action—a human and a divine. Four

archangels arrive in Canterbury on a day in the thirteenth century to take an invisible but active part in the rebuilding of the choir of the cathedral. On the human plane we see the drama of William of Sens who was given the commission for rebuilding. He justifies a dissolute private life by his great devotion to his trade. His pride in the work he is doing reaches such a point that he is sure God would let nothing happen to him because he is indispensable to God's work. His downfall is carried out on the divine plane when Michael, the warrior archangel, is sent with his sword to cut the rope drawing the architect up to set the keystone in the great arch. It is carried out on the human plane by the two who were set to wind the windlass and watch for flaws in the rope. The architect at that moment is brazenly flirting with his mistress. The young worker is stimulated to laugh and sing love songs and does not watch the rope. The other, an overpious brother, is too shocked and too busy praying to watch the rope.

At the end the two levels are even more closely bound together. The archangels come in the night to the side of the crippled architect to bid him prepare for his death. He repents of his sins of the flesh but is not even conscious of his greatest sin—the sin of pride. Only when the archangels oppose the supreme abnegation of Christ to his clinging to his work is he purged of his pride. At daybreak he agrees to leave the work to others who can carry on better without his disturbing presence. The archangels are more than chorus—they work out the will of God through the struggles and deeds of man.

Much less dramatic is Miss Sayers' Canterbury play of last summer, *The Devil To Pay*. This dramatization of the Faust theme gives a new human interpretation to an old supernatural legend. Not too great love of knowledge, Miss Sayers thinks, is the besetting sin of the man of today but the desire to reform the world, to hasten the improvement of man's lot "regardless of the ineluctable nature of things." But we see too little of the drama on the human plane, and what we see is dismissed very quickly. Faustus gains his magic power in order to give money to the poor, to make the cripple whole, and to restore the lost dead. But that does not make people any happier, Miss Sayers tell us. They all turn on Faustus. The poor woman finds that when her husband has money he leaves home and

lives wantonly with harlots, the cripple complains that now he must work to live, and the bereaved husband finds that his restored wife is become a shrew and a vixen—he was better off when she was dead. For evil and pain are not to be removed from the world by “one resplendent miracle.” They are but the converse of good, as shadow is the converse of light. Further, Miss Sayers tells us, Change is but another name for Evil. Faustus despairs, and in order to regain a state of innocence lost through Eve and to live in bliss with the dream of Lilith or Trojan Helen he sells his soul on the condition that Mephistopheles take away all knowledge of good and evil.

The last scene, completely outside the world, is the most effective. When Mephistopheles claims the soul, he discovers that, deprived of a knowledge of good and evil, it has become but a shriveled black puppy—useless. He has been cheated. Before God’s justice he lays his case. Faustus is recalled to choose if he will remain a neutral soul wandering between spheres or a real soul, able to watch, from hell’s torments, the wonder of the fiery victory of God. When he chooses to take up again his human responsibility, hope of eventual release and reunion with God is promised him. This last scene becomes a theological drama of the conflict between God’s archangels and Mephistopheles and has little relationship to the sketchy scenes of Faustus’ attempts to improve the lot of man.

Not only does Miss Sayers use the traditional characters and incidents of the old tale, she plans it for a late-medieval type of stage, with a row of conventional “mansions.” At one side is a vivid hell-mouth, a monstrous head with a flapping jaw and a gleaming eye; at the other, a shining temple of columns from which heavenly characters are to enter. Between are several formal panels in a screen, planned to indicate, with a few simple changes, Faustus’ study, the forum at Rome, the court of the emperor, and the Heavenly Justice.

Miss Sayers’ work illustrates both the powerful resources of the movement and its great limitations. Perhaps it is because the authors have restricted themselves to a few theological themes and have drawn on the rich resources of traditional church ritual that they have reached such high levels of achievement. But their careful avoidance of contemporary problems is striking. They do not ask what the church can do to improve the present lot of man; they show how religion has helped men of past ages to keep courage and faith in



a world that is dark and evil. Both *The Rock* of 1931 and *The Tower* of 1939 stress the old church functions of providing beautiful buildings for worship and ceremonies for christenings, marriages, and funerals. Last summer, a few months after the end of Czechoslovakia, Miss Sayers' characters proclaimed that it was evil to try to hasten the slow will of God. If the religious plays seem more vital than the professional, West End London drama, they seem very restricted and narrow when compared with the plays of New York or Dublin. The anti-war theme, which in America has produced such exciting plays as *Bury the Dead* and *Idiot's Delight*, made English audiences so uncomfortable that it was ruled out of Church of England productions by 1933. Only in the free churches, as in some Quaker groups, could an attempt be made to treat peace as anything more than a theological conception. Only in the free churches could much be said about the place of the church in creating better social conditions.

This seeking for the traditional, the timeless, and this fear of contemporary social problems, seem a telling expression of England's spiritual state as each year brought a more disturbing international crisis. So important did rearmament become that social improvements were postponed. In the name of Patriotism and Defense labor demands were refused, and the rehousing program was allowed to lag. It is not surprising that the year of Munich, the October pogroms, and the invasion of Prague and Warsaw saw the greatest English interest in plays with a traditional religious theme.

What future the religious-drama movement has depends on how long the war lasts. A war of many years would probably be followed by a cynical, pleasure-seeking age which would find little use for the forms or themes of the religious plays. If the writers and workers can carry over to a post-war period the interest and the techniques they have already achieved, we can expect a vigorous flowering of religious drama concerned with the part of the church in rebuilding the social order. Many of the writers and most of the clergy have shown that, when the attitude of the public is right, they are ready to bring the institution of worship nearer the everyday needs of man. The St. Pancras private rehousing project is an example of what can be accomplished under the promotion of the clergy.

That the new forms of dramatic poetry and allegory can be used

with great power in treating contemporary material has been proved by the authors of *The Ascent of F6*. That contemporary religious problems can furnish excellent material for drama has been proved by Paul Vincent Carroll in his two powerful plays of Irish religious life, *Shadow and Substance* and *The White Steed*, and by Philip Barry in his recent allegory of a modern search for God, *Here Come the Clowns*. The wealth of enthusiasm and creative talent already stirred up in England and the important new techniques developed form an excellent basis for future drama. The accomplishments of the movement in England offer a challenging example to America of what can be done when the spiritual leaders promote the creation and enjoyment of better plays.

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### TEACHING COMPOSITION AS A CAREER

GEORGE S. WYKOFF<sup>1</sup>

Among the many serious critical charges leveled, from both within and without the profession, against the teaching and teacher of English, the lowly teacher of composition has had more than his just share.<sup>2</sup> Scorned or ignored by those who give courses in literature in graduate and undergraduate schools, he is further bewildered by the mass of specific charges against him: that he stresses grammar which has no relation to writing; that he teaches, as incorrect, expressions which have been in idiomatic good use long enough to be generally accepted; that he emphasizes mechanics when he should be stressing content; that his students, even after years of training, cannot spell, punctuate, or use correct grammar; that his students, even if they do write correctly, have nothing to say.

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<sup>2</sup> For recent typical examples of criticism of graduate training in English, of teaching of literature, and of composition teaching, see, respectively, Howard Mumford Jones, "What's the Matter with Literary Scholarship?" *Saturday Review of Literature*, XIX (March 18, 1939), 3, 4; Barrows Dunham, "Sophomores in the Realms of Gold," *English Journal* (Coll. Ed.), XXVIII (1939), 185-92; Oscar James Campbell, "The Failure of Freshman English," *English Journal* (Coll. Ed.), XXVIII (1939), 177-85; J. S. P. Tatlock, "Nostra maxima culpa," *PMLA*, LIII (1938), 1313-20.

The purpose of this article is to give some consideration to the charges against the composition teacher by discovering, if possible, wherein the fault lies, and to make some modest proposals whereby the situation might be improved.

One major assumption, to begin with, must be made, namely, that teaching composition is of considerable importance—fully as important as teaching literature and doing literary research. This assumption is made partly because our economic superiors who put their money behind our teaching have every right to expect that our products be able to read, speak, and write intelligently and intelligibly and partly because there are overwhelming numbers of teachers and students engaged in composition. At the present time there are, in American colleges and universities, about 375,000 Freshman students,<sup>3</sup> who take, usually, at least two semesters of composition. With an average of 30 students to a section, there are 12,500 composition sections each semester. If the average number of such sections for each teacher is two, there are, each semester, 6,250 teachers of composition; if three, 4,166; if four, 3,125.<sup>4</sup> Thus it is very possible that the number of people teaching composition (not taking into account the undergraduate courses in advanced, specialized courses in composition) surpasses the number teaching literature. Furthermore, depending upon local conditions, some of these teachers have classes only in composition; others devote 75, 50, or 25 per cent of their time to it; nor does the fact that, as Howard Mumford Jones says, "These teachers do not wish to labor forever at elementary work, but to rise in the world" (i.e., to leave the deserts of composition for the greener pastures of literature and of research), alter the figures much, for as these depart, others come, and composition teaching and teachers, like the poor, are always with us. Hence the assumptions of this paragraph.

<sup>3</sup> This figure is a slight increase over the last available estimate, that for the year 1935-36, when the statistical returns from 1,628 colleges and universities (junior colleges and state teachers' colleges included; summer sessions excluded) indicated 366,734 Freshmen. See Henry G. Badger, Frederick J. Kelly, and Walter J. Greenleaf, *Statistics of Higher Education, 1935-36* (Bull. 2 [1937]; Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1938), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> No attempt has been made to estimate the number of composition teachers or students in the secondary schools of the United States.

## I

Professional writers inform us that they have achieved success in spite of their college courses in English. From them composition teachers get no credit. And nonprofessional writers—whether as students in non-English courses or as graduates in the postcollegiate world—if they have difficulty in writing, shift the blame, as do those for whom they write, back to the ones who gave the training. This blame the English teacher meekly accepts from his academic colleagues and his administrative superiors and from the world at large.

He, in turn, shifts the responsibility to his students (after all, you can't teach the unteachable and ill-prepared), and so back to the harassed, overburdened high-school teacher; or he doubts the value of his content—grammar and rules—in teaching writing and looks in vain to the education experts for methods to solve his problems. He trembles with anger when his critics say that those who themselves are unable to write cannot teach others how. Except for its economic implications, he welcomes the startling proposal that colleges ignore the fact that many students need training in everyday writing, abolish courses in composition, and let the poor students solve their own difficulties.

Though shouldering the blame, the English teacher refuses to believe that the fundamental difficulty—largely through no fault of his own—lies in himself. He never dares speak out boldly to the graduate schools that gave him no training for teaching composition; to his administrative superiors who give him no incentive for even trying to do good work; and to both for stifling whatever interest he may once, in his salad days, have had for the task. Yet, if you want to find out why English teachers are not successfully teaching composition, look at their training, their incentives, and their lack of interest. In other words, if a teacher consciously chooses composition as a career, what can be his training, making use of present-day facilities, and what can be his rewards (since man can live neither by bread—nor by themes—alone)?

1. *Training.*—The natural place for training in composition and composition-teaching is the graduate school. But training in English in the graduate schools is primarily training for scholarship, research, and graduate teaching, and secondarily training for teach-



ing literature to undergraduates. Only remotely, indirectly, and inadvertently—in so far as studies of literary figures and periods and a few linguistic courses do help—does graduate study aid the teacher of composition. Very few graduate schools offer any work in composition, and those few give, among numerous literature courses, one or two courses, such as "Creative Writing" or "Writing for Publication"—designed not for the teacher but for the potential author.

Consciously or unconsciously, the graduate student quickly learns that literature and research are all-important (he is unaware that composition exists, unless he is a graduate assistant); nor does the disillusionment of his first few years' teaching alter this idea very much.

In the graduate school all students are given the same general discipline—literature, scholarship, research—whether they are, or are to be, grade, high-school, college, or graduate-school teachers of English. It is small wonder, therefore, that many secondary-school teachers (if they do any graduate study) return to their work convinced of the desirability of teaching literature and evade the burdensome task of teaching composition (perhaps an important reason why college Freshmen are frequently poorly prepared in writing). And small wonder, too, that conscientious secondary-school teachers are turning to schools of education for assistance vainly sought from graduate schools of English.

Yet administrators and curriculum-makers in the graduate schools cannot help being aware of this problem and must know that their M.A. and even their Ph.D. candidates will do considerable composition-teaching before they teach their specialties. Hence, an amazing anomaly in the academic world: thousands of teachers engaged in the field of composition, with from 25 to 100 per cent of their time devoted to that work, with a fair-sized majority of English sections composed of composition students—and no training, even inadequate, possible for these teachers.<sup>5</sup>

Without any preparatory training, composition teachers learn

<sup>5</sup> At present there seems little likelihood that graduate schools of English will provide training for prospective teachers of composition. *The Teaching of College English* (comp. Oscar James Campbell [New York and London, 1934], chaps. viii and ix) indicates that the graduate schools are satisfied with the *status quo*. The mathematics

what composition-teaching is, its problems, and their possible solution, by haphazard methods, imitating the composition teachers of their own undergraduate courses and querying colleagues who may be getting satisfactory results from their own experimental methods.

If there were a graduate training in composition, what should it include? Only a large committee of experienced, successful teachers of graduate and undergraduate students could give an answer, after serious investigation and experimentation. Such a committee might consider courses in linguistics and the history of language; the history of composition-teaching; advanced grammar; methods and content of Freshman composition; practice teaching; and methods, content, and practice in other kinds of composition, such as familiar-essay writing, short-story writing, exposition, argument, magazine-article writing, business letters, technical writing, and journalism.

At present, if no one experienced is available, the composition teacher dutifully attacks any of these courses, although all he knows about them is what he reads in textbooks, often written by others with no more actual experience than he has. If the theory be true (it need not be) that only those who can write are successful teachers of writing, there are few successful teachers. For there are teachers of business correspondence who do not write twenty business letters in a year; teachers of the short story who have never written a salable story; and teachers of report-writing who have never seen examples of reports outside the few printed in textbooks. Except what they have learned through trial-and-error methods in elementary and perhaps advanced composition, composition teachers know little about composition as a field, and most of that little is sheer theory.

2. *Incentives.*—The second reason for the present unsatisfactory results in composition-teaching is the motives that impel the teacher to do good work. Beyond feeding his body, there are none.

Let the composition teacher spend hours on preparations; or carefully prepare lists of interest-compelling theme topics and devise new methods of obtaining the interest of his students; or shoulder the

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teachers have faced more realistically the problems of research versus those of college teaching. See a report by the Commission on the Training and Utilization of Advanced Students of Mathematics, quoted in part in the *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*, XXI (1935), 567-69.

task of reading from 100 to 125—or even 250—themes a week; or write a fourth- to a half-page of comment and advice on each theme, and devote fifteen to thirty minutes conferring with each student about each theme; or so train his students that they write marvelous masterpieces of unity, coherence, and emphasis (if they do, he gets no credit; if they don't, his colleagues in other departments rend the air with outcries—just as he himself viciously condemns the secondary-school teachers of his poorly prepared students and has no word of praise for teachers of the well prepared); let the composition teacher attend and take an active part in conferences and conventions (if there are any) of composition teachers; or do research in methods of improving students' writing and publish his results—let him do all these things, and his rewards are either nonexistent or far from comparable with those given the literature teacher whose main achievement has been the publication, annually, of a scholarly note or two.

"I might have got a raise in salary," said a composition teacher recently, "if I had published a few more articles in *PMLA* and *American Literature*." Professor Oscar James Campbell recently wrote: "I know of large departments of English in which no one has been promoted from an instructorship to an assistant professorship for over ten years. Instead, men from other institutions have been brought in over the heads of the wretched section hands. This process is natural—yes, inevitable—because the work of a Freshman English instructor does not fit him for the teaching of literature."<sup>6</sup> Ten long weary years of compositional service—and the rewards went to the other fellow!

3. *Lack of interest.*—Given no preparation for teaching and denied incentives for efficient work, the teacher might easily be excused for lack of interest in his compositional tasks, a lack well evidenced by the fact that all English teachers—in all times and places—prefer, given a choice, teaching literature to composition. They face their literature classes with far more enthusiasm than their composition classes; they eagerly scan new schedules to see how many literature courses a beneficent Providence has bestowed; and they carefully

<sup>6</sup> "The Failure of Freshman English," *English Journal* (Coll. Ed.), XVIII (1939), 182.

count class rolls to find how many or how few themes a week they will have to read.

The teacher's lack of interest in composition finds support from his own self-pity at the huge stack of themes always waiting to be read; from his wife, who regrets he can't "go places" because "John has a set of themes to do tonight"; from his colleagues in other departments, who, with their respective spouses, commiserate with him over his many themes (until his poorest students get into their classes!); and from his university, which, unless he is exceedingly fortunate, graciously permits the use of the darkest rooms in the oldest buildings for his compositional tasks. His teachers in graduate schools lament when they learn he is going to an institution where the composition load is heavy. And his erstwhile fellow-students in the graduate school, not yet having been forced off the diving-plank into the compositional deeps, shake his hand in sorrow and consign him to the limbo of lost scholarly souls. Alas, poor Yorick, they knew him well!

It is not cause for wonder, therefore, that Professor Campbell has labeled teachers of composition as "pedagogic pretenders," "academic proletarians," "section hands," "doers of drudgery," and "unhappy, disillusioned men and women."

Little wonder, too, if these disillusioned men and women should offer the following cynical, though practical, advice to the neophyte beginning his life as a college English teacher: "Wise is that man—or woman—who spends as little time as possible (without being found out) on his compositional work; he will read as few themes as he can, and those few as swiftly and shoddily as he can; he will make no serious, honest effort to help his students improve; he will cut short every unavoidable conference with them. Instead, he will devote his major energies and most of his time to attaining his two higher degrees, and then to doing research and publishing. Only thus can he find a place in the academic sun and enter upon a life that rewards him with pleasure, profit, honor, dignity, satisfaction, and—yes, even beauty."

## II

Let us now wander along the classic halls of the state-supported University of Utopia, whose composition teachers have been ade-



quately prepared for their tasks, have been given incentives for labor, and have consequently a vital interest and pride in their work.

The teaching-load is nine hours a week: two sections of elementary composition (each limited to twenty students), one of advanced composition (limited to fifteen students). Themes, written two times a week, are each read twice, slowly and carefully, in order to check for errors missed on the first reading and to help eliminate disparity in theme-grading between instructors, whereby, formerly, the same theme, read as an experiment by several instructors, varied from the lowest almost to the highest mark—so that students truthfully said their final grade depended not so much upon the themes they wrote as upon the instructor for whom they wrote. There is time for writing intelligible, helpful comments upon each theme (unlike that classic once appearing on a Freshman paper: "You should develop a grace of style and depth of comprehension. You need, too, to understand the aesthetic and spiritual values of the world's art, literary and pictorial"). Each theme is the basis for a ten-minute conference. There is adequate time for class preparation, for theme topics cannot be hastily prepared in the ten-minute intervals between classes. Successful attempts are made to learn the students' interests, technical and general, so that students write upon subjects of interest to both themselves and their instructors. Arrangements are being perfected whereby not more than half the working-week is devoted to class duties.

The other half of the week is utilized in various ways. There is time for professional reading: for the twenty to thirty articles a month on composition and teaching, in the professional magazines, and the two or three professional books a month (not including textbooks). The teacher of business English studies all the magazines on letter-writing and advertising; the teacher of report-writing reads consistently a number of engineering magazines and numerous technical reports, as they become available. Ten or fifteen hours is profitably spent in "keeping up" with developments in the field of composition. But even in Utopia the teacher of composition feels the need of a complete bibliography of compositional materials, similar to those prepared for special fields in literature. Textbooks are carefully examined (there are, each year, for Freshman English alone,

four or five new handbooks and rhetorics, six or eight books of essays, and five or six books of practice leaves) to make sure they will be satisfactory after adoption; no book is adopted on the basis of a two- or three-minute examination of the table of contents and a hasty turning of pages.

At the University of Utopia there is time for research in composition and for studying the research of others. Teachers are learning whether teaching composition (or literature) is more effective with small classes than with large; whether a system of uniform theme-grading can be developed, so that the theme grade will not depend upon the idiosyncrasies of the instructor; what the value of the thirty or forty placement tests in English composition is, in segregating the good and the poor students from the average; what the various vocabulary-building methods are and how they work (Utopia is somewhat concerned about this, since various business firms are hiring college graduates partly on what they do in a vocabulary examination); how effective various correction-sheet methods used with themes are; how conferences can best be conducted, and how effective they are, based on two comparable groups of students, one receiving conferences, the other not; whether outside reading requirements encourage students to do more reading for themselves (Utopia teachers spend considerable time reading fiction and nonfiction books, and keeping reading-lists up to date); how to teach students to write good book reports; and how to keep students honest in all their written work. There is constant adjustment of the content of the various compositional courses to suit changing needs; but somewhere along the way compositional students learn how to use the power of thinking and to organize this thought, how to define adequately, how to use the library profitably, when to use quotation marks, when to paraphrase, how to use footnotes, and how to write letters. Also, teachers are constantly on the alert for shifting standards of usage and for changes in modern English.

Without taking others' word for it, Utopia teachers are spending time to investigate the relation, if any, between a knowledge of grammar and the ability to write correctly; to build a list of grammatical concepts which assist the student in writing; to learn the relationship between a knowledge of the rules of punctuation and

their application; and, similarly, to find the relation between ability to spell and ability to write and between a large vocabulary and writing. Constant experiments are carried on to improve the spelling of poor students.

The department of composition at Utopia, as part of its duties, co-operates wholeheartedly (without semblance of meddling) with the high schools of the state. It knows the teachers, what and how they teach, and the problems that they face. (If college teachers of composition shudder at the terrible, soul-haunting mistakes of their worst Freshmen, what must be the mental and spiritual state of the high-school teacher who must take all comers—some far worse than are ever seen in college—and who has, besides, the problems of school discipline and of placating disgruntled parents?) It sends representatives to their state high-school convention, invites them to the annual college English teachers' meeting, and sponsors a spring conference of near-by high-school English teachers with the members of its own staff. (Utopia's high-school English conventions are different from those in America, where teachers are given, usually, several "inspirational" addresses on the beauties of teaching literature and of introducing budding minds to the masterpieces of the ages—and are then expected to teach, with renewed enthusiasm, composition classes of 35, 40, 45, and 50 students.) Utopia knows which high schools send well-prepared students to college—and congratulates them; which schools send ill-prepared—and seeks to find the cause; and it labors with the mystery of why often the same high schools lead in the number of both well prepared and ill-prepared. It sponsors placement tests for high-school Juniors and Seniors: for Juniors, that poor students may remedy their weaknesses; for Seniors, that the poorest may be discouraged from attending college, and the best be advised to come, if they have not so planned.

The department of composition at Utopia has completely emancipated itself and the English departments of the high schools from the benevolent, though often exasperating and dictatorial, tyranny of departments and schools of education. Their situation is thus a true utopian contrast with that of the secondary and higher institutions in the United States, where surveys of the English-teaching field are made by people in education (because teachers of English—truly

enough—are not trained for that work); where educational experts build tests for measurements of achievement in reading, vocabulary, composition, spelling, and the appreciation of poetry; where they reiterate that a knowledge of grammar has no relation to correct writing; where, if English teachers prepare a placement test in English, an education man must be among its authors, or there is no confidence in it; where English teachers depend upon the education experts for the meaning of scores, correlations, and percentiles; where requirements for prospective high-school teachers of English, and their training too, are determined by teachers in education; where state boards ask the advice of education experts, not teachers of English, when any changes are contemplated affecting the teaching of English; where the syllabi of courses of study in English for secondary schools are prepared by committees of education experts, with no advice or assistance from English teachers; where methods of teaching English are presented in the department of education; where candidates for high-school positions such as football or basketball coaching are certified by departments of education (oh, yes, these candidates can also teach English, although they may have made the lowest possible passing grade in their college English courses); where the brilliant young English major with a B.A., a Phi Beta Kappa key, and other scholastic honors—a Ph.D., even—is prevented from teaching English in high schools because he lacks certain courses in the department of education.

Finally, in Utopia, the teacher of composition has time and money to belong to, read the publications of, and take part in the affairs of, certain national and state organizations. These correspond, in America, to the National Council of Teachers of English; the College English Association; the Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education; the American Association of University Professors; the Modern Language Association of America; and state organizations interested in English-teaching.

And, by a wise use of chronology, all these activities, rights, duties, and privileges, class and extra-class, take no more time than the average working-week of forty-four or forty-eight hours. The teacher's evenings are entirely for social, recreational, and nonprofessional-reading activities.



## III

Now, as Matthew Arnold said in another context of a plan of study of his, we might call this no mean profession for a college teacher—the profession of English composition. It is a far cry, indeed, from the situation of the present time, when the problem of poor composition on the part of our students lies before us like an immovable mountain—and with it the problem, Professor Campbell tells us, of the “unhappy, disillusioned men and women” who are composition teachers. Solutions of these problems have received, in various publications, urgently needed discussion—yet the problems still remain.

But if there could be found more humanity in those who teach the humanities on the higher levels, so that teachers and prospective teachers in undergraduate institutions could be more thoroughly prepared for the composition they are going to teach for a varying period, perhaps for a lifetime; if there could be found more humanity in those who, having been trained in the humanities, are now executives in undergraduate institutions and in positions to offer incentives to their composition teachers, tolerantly to understand their problems, and thus to arouse their interest in their work—may it not be that the harrowing problems of poor composition would be wisely solved and that the composition teachers (now the academic proletarians, the section hands, the doers of drudgery, the unhappy, disillusioned men and women) would also find their places in the academic sun and would enter upon a life that rewards them with pleasure, profit, honor, dignity, satisfaction, and—yes, even beauty?

## COMPOSITION BY CRITICAL ANALYSIS

WINTHROP TILLEY<sup>1</sup>

### I

Evidence of widespread disillusionment with Freshman composition is piling up. Yet few English teachers who have struggled with entering Freshmen would agree with Professor Campbell that the answer is to throw the whole thing out the window and bring the survey course in the door. Freshmen do need some sort of language training, and they need it badly. The method described below is an attempt to face this problem squarely and to find a workable solution.

The experiment was carried on during the year 1938-39 at the Connecticut State College (now the University of Connecticut). This is a state-supported institution offering curriculums in agriculture, arts and sciences, engineering, and home economics, the students of the several curriculums being distributed indifferently into Freshman English sections. Sectioning on the basis of ability in English is practiced, however, and an additional semester's work is required of those students making low-quarter scores on an English placement test. The work here described was carried on with three sections, two slow and one normal, with certain differences in emphasis and more particularly in speed. In general it took the two slow sections approximately two semesters to cover the work done by the normal students in one semester.

### II

The essential device of the method was Basic English, a selection of eight hundred and fifty English words so chosen that with them one may say, so far as plain sense is concerned, anything necessary to be said. There are also simple rules for putting these words together in

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sentences.<sup>2</sup> It was made clear to the students from the start that Basic English was not to be learned as an end in itself but as a means to a better understanding of what language is and how it works.

The students equipped themselves with a text prepared by the writer,<sup>3</sup> with the *Basic Dictionary*, a selection of seventy-five hundred common English words and suggestions for putting them in Basic, and with *Basic Words*, a book making clear the range of senses of the eight hundred and fifty words of the Basic list.

It is not possible in limited space to give a detailed account of how the work went forward, but in general the procedure was as follows. In the first three or four weeks the students were made acquainted with Basic English and prepared various written exercises designed to bring about a reasonably quick understanding of the working of the Basic system. Attention was given to words and their functions, to changes in the forms of words, to the formation of compound words, to specialized and metaphorical uses of words.<sup>4</sup>

The next step was a consideration of sentences and of variety in sentence form. So long as one is writing in Basic, it is possible to determine by a mechanical test whether one has written a complete sentence, and this fact was made clear to the students. Thereafter general consideration was given to the nature of the sentence, this material being applicable both to Basic and to complete English. The study of sentence variety was carried forward with the idea of making one point clear: that no sentence may be classed as good or bad as to form without a knowledge of the purpose its writer had in mind. Though most text writers pay lip service to this idea, their discussions of the subject commonly leave it almost completely out of account. It may be necessary to add that discussions of these matters went forward without using conventional grammatical terminology.

In the study of punctuation, which came next, a special effort was

<sup>2</sup> Persons desiring a quick introduction to Basic will find it in C. K. Ogden's *The System of Basic English* (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1934). An extensive list of books in and about Basic may be had from Barnes & Noble, 105 Fifth Ave., New York City.

<sup>3</sup> *Basic English for College Freshmen* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Bros., 1938) (planographed).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-30. A general idea of the sort of approach may also be had from reading pp. 40-64 of *The System of Basic English*.

made to state the rules in terms of sense rather than of grammar and to distinguish between the more and the less important punctuation usages. Clearly, much more can be done in teaching punctuation as a way of making sense, and in devising exercises in which punctuation will actually determine sense, by resolving ambiguity or otherwise making clear what was obscure.<sup>5</sup>

The students' next task was to do some actual writing in Basic English for practice in making use of the complete system. At this point, as throughout the work, it was emphasized that learning to write Basic was merely a means to an end.

Following this, the students turned to the close study of how eight passages of complete English had been put into Basic. The originals and the Basic accounts, together with some comment, appeared in the text.<sup>6</sup> Most of the passages dealt chiefly with fact and opinion, though two (one of verse) had considerable emotional content. As this study went forward the students were engaged in putting complete English passages into Basic. At first, uniform assignments were made; this was helpful in making classroom comment and analysis of interest to all. After a time the students were directed to make their own selections, approval by the instructor usually being required. The students were encouraged to choose passages from their own texts, especially those in social-science courses, to bring home to them the practical value of Basic in getting an understanding of language used in college work quite outside that of the English department. One assignment was to make a Basic account of Hardy's *Hap*; this resulted in two or three extremely lively class hours in which the students spiritedly gave their interpretations of this poem.

Since by the time they undertook this work the students had a reasonable grasp of the Basic system, these tasks were almost pure exercises in interpretation. Making a Basic account of a complete English passage involves much more than the simple substitution of Basic word *x* for complete English word *y*; there are no Basic equiva-

<sup>5</sup> The most effective work on punctuation in the course was an outcome of the fact that subsequent work forced the students to take very seriously into account the part played by punctuation in determining sense, though no mention of the subject, except in passing, was made in connection with these assignments.

<sup>6</sup> *Basic English for College Freshmen*, pp. 47-69.



lents which may be applied mechanically and without thought. The problem is one of restating on a simpler level the sense of what has already been said on a more complex one. Above all, the student must have some clear idea of what the original writer was attempting. No intelligible Basic account is possible without this understanding. And if the student is to write sensible Basic, he must take very carefully into account the relations between words—both grammatical and logical relations. He must often make choices between several possible interpretations—or even indicate more than one possible interpretation in his Basic account. A result of all this is a closer and more careful attention to what language is and how it works than most college students are ever called on to give.

When the students had become fairly adept at this sort of work, they were asked to do more of it and in addition to write—in complete English—comparing the Basic with the original, discussing any special points of difficulty they encountered. A sample paper of this sort is here given exactly as it was submitted by the student:

#### ORIGINAL

The recently revived conflict between religion and science on the question of evolution seems to be based on misconception on both sides. A belief in evolution and in the existence of a Creative Intelligence are in no way incompatible. The study of evolution is merely a study of the mechanics of creation with a recognition of the continuity of the creative process. The evolutionist can determine the steps by which new forms of life have come into being, but he remains ignorant of the "force" responsible for these changes and for their direction. He can prove that life, whose source itself is unknown, has assumed more and more complex forms with the passage of time, but he cannot tell us why it has done so. He cannot even forecast, with any degree of accuracy, what forms evolving life will assume. His researches to date make the existence of a Creative Intelligence more rather than less probable.<sup>7</sup>

#### BASIC ACCOUNT

The argument which came to a head again a short time back between religion and science on the question of the development of our complete system of living seems to be based on false ideas kept by both sides. A belief in this development of man from lower animals and in the existence of some sort of Higher Being, who is acting as a Guiding Hand and who put man on the earth after having made the earth itself, are in no way out of place. Learning about

<sup>7</sup> This was taken from a sociology book.

this development, which is science's theory, is simply learning about the principle of the birth of all existence and at the same time being conscious of the fact that the building process of living has been a smooth, unbroken forward moving. He who is a supporter of this theory of development is able to make out the steps by which new forms of existence have come into being, but he is still in the dark about the "force" responsible for these changes and for their direction. He can make certain, by experience and argument, that existence, of whose root itself he has no knowledge, has taken on more and more complex forms with the flight of time, but he is unable to give us an account, without a large number of errors, as to what forms existence, which is ever undergoing expansion, will take on. His work on this question up until the present makes the existence of a Higher Being, a Guiding Hand, more in place of less probable.

#### COMMENT

The first few times I read this passage through, I didn't realize that two opposing theories were being explained and compared. My comment had been based on the fact that I was in the muddle as far as the theory of evolution was concerned. Not being a student of sociology and the development of man, I didn't at first realize that the beliefs in a Creative Intelligence and in evolution were two different theories of creation and for a while I couldn't see how one could have a belief in such a thing as "the mechanics of creation." The use of so many fictions had left me where I couldn't tell where one fiction began and another ended. This, I believe, is the reason for my confusion at first. Many of these fictions are so vague that it is almost impossible to translate them with their full meanings.

Evolution has been translated as "the development of man from lower animals." It was done in this manner in order to compare evolution to the theory that man was placed on earth by a Higher Being. The words "Creative Intelligence" aroused some interest and some question. The word "Intelligence" seemed to imply that the world was being guided by a Higher Being who had life all planned out and so it was translated with that in mind. The phrase "mechanics of creation" offered a little difficulty, but I finally decided that "principle of birth" would be accurate enough in view of the fact that principles are often associated with mechanics. It may have been noticed that the word "force," which is another fiction, is left in the basic account. The reason for this is that, inasmuch as the evolutionist knows nothing about it, it is impossible to give it a material definition.

The latter half of the passage obviously is comparing the two theories. It suggests that the theory of evolution can proceed just so far in its explanation of life and from there, religion's philosophy carries on. At the end, it goes so far as to say that the arguments established by evolutionists help to increase the probability of the existence of a Creative Intelligence.

From this discussion, it is apparent that it is necessary to reread passages,

such as the one I translated, several times in order to get the complete and correct meanings in their proper relationship. This passage is an excellent example, I believe, of the value and virtues of Basic English. Whether or not I was able to translate it clearly into basic makes little difference. The fact remains that I think I know more of what the passage contains than I would have otherwise. The basic account may not run as smoothly as the original but it is certainly of more value to a reader than the original.

It is of course quite possible to quarrel with this work at various points. First of all, it may be said that the Basic account contains three words not in the Basic word list (*principle, can, until*) and at least one idiom not within the range of sense permitted by the Basic system (*came to a head*). The Basic is not always as smooth as possible. Though the comment seems on the whole reasonably well written and intelligent, there is a contradiction and confusion of thought in the last paragraph. This work, however, was done by a first-semester Freshman before the Christmas holidays and would, I think, bear up pretty well when compared with the usual "themes" produced by conventional systems.

In the semester examination the students were asked to make a Basic account of a passage having to do with fact and opinion, to make a fully expanded Basic account of a short metaphor, to compare this with the original metaphor, and to state in complete English the suggestions brought to mind by the metaphor, together with a determination of how many of these suggestions were pertinent to the intent of the original author.

### III

Once the preliminary work of a course like the one outlined here is out of the way, the attention of student and teacher is focused on practical problems of communication and on trying to understand the processes of reading and writing. It is now becoming fashionable to state as a truism that persons write badly because they read badly, and I am sure this is true; but, so far as I know, courageous and thoroughgoing attacks on the problem of reading comprehension based on a definite and workable technique have so far not been put forward. It is hardly enough to put out a book of essays and ask a few more or less searching questions about them at the end. The problem is delicate and complex, and I for one do not see how it can

be successfully met without a clearly prescribed technique. Basic English seems to me a complete and flexible instrument which can and should be used. The time taken by the student in learning to use it is not great (a good student who will put his mind on it can learn to write acceptable Basic in less than a week), and the fact that it gives a common ground for attacking problems of communication is of great value.

A second great advantage of the method described here is that it provides for the study of English as a living language. The student is not asked to concern himself with abstractions like unity and coherence, or with formulated rules having to do with dangling modifiers, the case of nouns linked with gerunds, and like matters. He is asked to determine clearly and accurately what a given writer or speaker was trying to do with language on a given occasion. Thus it might be claimed that this sort of work is at least a step toward what has been called rhetoric for a democracy.<sup>8</sup> In short, it directs attention not to the tangential but to the central aspects of language study.

One more of the advantages may be mentioned here. This method is a complete solution of the problem of what the student is to write about. He is to write critical analyses of specific material; the course in rhetoric will deal at last with rhetoric. I am fully conscious of my assumption here that Freshman English should have as its chief object the training of the student to understand written language and to produce written language which may be understood.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Warren Taylor, "Rhetoric in a Democracy," *English Journal*, December, 1938.

<sup>9</sup> Some common objections to such a use of basic as is here recommended have been answered by I. A. Richards in *Basic in Teaching: East and West* (London: Kegan Paul, 1935) and in *Interpretation in Teaching* (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1938), chap. xi. I can merely add here the testimony of a practical classroom teacher that the objections have no weight in the light of actual classroom experience.



## THE NEW YORK CONVENTION

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The Twenty-eighth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, held in the Hotel Pennsylvania, the Hotel New Yorker, and the huge auditorium now known as Manhattan Center, in New York City, November 23-25, 1939, was probably the largest gathering of subject-matter specialists ever held. Registered members of the convention numbered 2,586—in spite of the fact that nearly half the states, including adjacent New England, had refused to advance their Thanksgiving celebrations, so that their teachers were not free.

The convention theme, "Unifying the English Program for the Individual," was really emphasized much more than convention themes usually are; but, particularly in the section meetings, so much latitude of attack was allowed that many subordinate issues appeared. Indeed, the reporter for *School and Society* (see its issue for December 2) felt that the attack upon, and the defense of, the ivory tower was the center of interest, and one could easily view the multifold convention through glasses polarized in several other planes. President Essie Chamberlain in the initial address of the convention struck the keynote, "Meeting Student Needs by a Planned Program in English." The text of her address appears in the *English Journal* for February.

At the same general session Frederick H. Bair, superintendent of the Bronxville schools, discussed the "Articulation of the Elementary and Secondary Schools," and Warner G. Rice, of the University of Michigan, "Articulation of the Secondary Schools and Colleges." This vertical unification of the individual's program was also the theme of one of the conferences on Friday afternoon, where Dora V. Smith presented a statesmanlike solution of the problem; and it was the real burden of Howard Mumford Jones's address at the College Luncheon on Friday noon.

Horizontal unification—more often called "integration" or "correlation"—of the work of the individual was discussed by T. R. McConnell, of the University of Minnesota, at the initial general session, and repeatedly by the conferences on Individual Differences and on Content and Procedures for Gifted Pupils Friday afternoon, by the Junior High School Section meeting on Saturday morning, and in numerous individual papers, such as the discussion of "English and Speech Co-operating"

by Commissioner Hermann Cooper, of the New York State Department of Education. Throughout there was strong emphasis upon the connection of the school work with the actual present interests and out-of-school activities of school pupils and college students. Indeed, the *mechanical* correlation of English with other subjects was viewed with little favor, and the advocacy of correlated or integrated courses was confined largely to proposals for meeting student needs as they arise by bringing in whatever subject matter or activities will be helpful, regardless of the field from which they come.

Reading, photoplay, radio, creative writing, and mechanical aids for English teaching all continued to receive attention. The Conference on English in Vocational Schools was an innovation, and the Conference on Content and Procedures for Gifted Pupils put a new emphasis upon one phase of the provision for individual differences.

At the Annual Dinner Friday evening the toastmaster was the genially laconic first vice-president, E. A. Cross. He introduced as the first feature of the evening's entertainment the "Choralites," a charming verse-speaking sextet from the National Broadcasting Company. Under the direction of Jack Wilcher they gave a remarkable exhibition of unison reading and "harmonizing," with solo parts and duets. Their readings, which were vigorously applauded, are available on Blue Bird records.

Hughes Mearns, author of *Creative Youth* and *Creative Power*, told how, as a young man, he had gone out onto the lawn with a typewriter and offered to write down anything the children would like to say. They accepted him, and then, later to him and others who were willing to be honest with the children and to get truth from them naturally, they said many things which might help us to understand children better. These preschool youngsters made such remarks as "Grandma is mad again—mad—mad! But she'll get over it," and "She loves me and loves me and loves me, and I want to play with my doll." Mearns does not feel that a lot of this sincere, even naïve, talk by children is poetry, but it is truth, and we ought not to be too much concerned about the language if the thought and the feeling are sincere. We ought not to instruct too much or to discourage by damning the inartistic.

Harry Morgan Ayres' informal talk about American English was essentially, thought not formally, a plea for tolerance in usage. He pointed out that there always has been variety in English speech since the days of Hengist and Horsa, so that there are four or five reputable sounds for the same vowel in the same word. He showed that some of the pronunciations and usages which purists condemn are really survivals of

earlier general usage and asserted that the *usual* eighteenth-century pronunciation of the participles like "*seeing*" dropped the *g*—that is, failed to nasalize the *n*. Professor Ayres explained the long-*i* pronunciation of "*neither*" as due to Cockney substitution of long *i* for long *a* in the original *mayther*. On the whole, the speaker showed sympathy with the vernacular, which is more uniform than the literary language, rather than with the latter, and no sympathy at all with the latinized grammar which tries to uproot expressions natural to our tongues.

The Dinner program ended with Edna Ferber's address, "How To Tell Books from Literature." Miss Ferber did not really try to explain how to distinguish between books and literature, and she did not attempt to be systematic in her talk. She did entertain the audience with witty sallies and stimulated it with significant remarks. She urged that teachers keep children reading but that they do not call the material offered "literature," for to do so puts it in the museum class and makes it something separate from everyday living. Miss Ferber tickled every funnybone in the house by reading, with amused and rebellious comments, one of those impertinent letters demanding personal information which teachers sometimes encourage pupils to write to famous men and women. It is difficult, said the speaker, always to tell which books are just books and which are literature. For instance, there was the smarty top-sergeant school of authors, who used ugly little words to shock and to make books best sellers, whereas *The Grapes of Wrath* is passionately felt, and the characters in it, while they use these same words, are just talking naturally. In *A Peculiar Treasure* Miss Ferber did not set out to write an autobiography but to say the thing she wanted to say about a middle-class Jewish family in America, and necessarily she had to say it about the one she knew best—her own. The speaker went on to suggest that, without making an explicit point of tolerance, teachers of English can educate the pupils in it by using such things as Thomas Mann's correspondence with the University of Bonn over the vacation of his degree, such works as those of Czech Karel Kapek, of Polish Grémont (*The Peasant*), and Chinese Lin Yutang. America is the last outpost of tolerance, and even here there is rampant, bestial intolerance. Incidentally, Miss Ferber advised teachers not to condemn the best sellers through fear that they will like something that others do and therefore not seem select; the Bible, for example, is the best seller of the ages.

The final session of the convention was the Saturday afternoon luncheon, which held in his seat until nearly four o'clock everyone who did not have an early train to catch.

The first speaker was Joseph Auslander, consultant in English poetry of the Library of Congress, critic, and poet. Mr. Auslander explained the very interesting origin of the world's greatest library in the financial distress of Jefferson, which caused him to appeal to Congress to buy his private library of six thousand volumes. The Library of Congress now contains six million volumes. Every morning when he walks down the corridor between the original copy of the Declaration of Independence framed on one side and the copy of the Constitution framed on the other, Auslander thanks God for our American liberties and for the privilege of working in such a place. As thousands of boys and girls pass through, they seem to catch the same spirit. "Liberty *will* not perish from the earth!"

The Office of the Consultant in English Poetry is arranging a series of exhibitions of the work of individual poets and has begun with Walt Whitman. This exhibit, which has been open since May 31, averages seven hundred visitors per day. Such exhibits will include the original manuscripts, when these can be obtained. For example, the complete set of Vachel Lindsay manuscripts is about to be acquired. The emendations, thinks Mr. Auslander, are a matter of very considerable importance. The great line of "O Captain, My Captain," "O the bleeding drops of red," appears as an emendation. The Library desires to save memorabilia of poets now living—and to pay for them. The Office of the Consultant in Poetry is also going to have a radio program of its own. It is now partly responsible for Malone's Poetic Pilgrimage, which drew 31,000 fan letters the first week.

In poetry there should be no left wing and right wing—but wings. The poet will not hitch his star to any wagon; he is not to be impressed into the service of politicians, either Hitler or Stalin. The moon is front-page news every night. Real poetry is not to be found in the service of propaganda but propagates great perception. Poets were aware of man's inhumanity of man before Karl Marx. Poetry, avoiding "isms," may go on feeding and explaining our hearts.

Ford K. Brown, of St. John's College, described the experiment there which is generally considered so revolutionary. First, he insisted that their new curriculum is not meant as a criticism of what is generally done in college education; it is really an experiment conducted to test the value of a theory. Moreover, he questions whether the reading of 110 great books—not necessarily *the* 110 great books—is hideously radical or reactionary. Must a student in such a college be necessarily a dope or a dupe?



Since there are no electives, there is no registration fuss, and no difficulty over size of classes. The first hour each morning for four years every student has mathematics. The second hour of the day is devoted to tutorial work in language, a different one each year. There are seminars in the evening and laboratory science three hours a week in the Freshman and Sophomore years and six hours in the Junior and Senior years. Formal lectures run ninety minutes.

The experiment has received a good deal of unwise publicity, partly because journalists did not wish to tone down a good story. Joe College, who is certainly not too wise, in this institution has no chance to make foolish choices or to be forced to take unwanted courses to fill up his program; nor has he any chance to relax when once he is started. The poor students, Professor Brown thinks, are really helped more than the brilliant ones; the strenuous course really seems to lift them.

The program was concluded by the charming informal talk of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, which might almost be called a visit with the audience. The paper which she did not read and some notes on what she did say appear elsewhere in this magazine.

President Essie Chamberlain then announced the tentative selection of Chicago as the 1940 meeting place and introduced as the new president E. A. Cross, Colorado State Teachers College, who declared the convention adjourned.

#### BUSINESS

In order to leave Thanksgiving afternoon free for matinees in the world's theater capital, the meeting of the Board of Directors was held on Thanksgiving morning at nine o'clock. In spite of the unconventional hour and the split observance of Thanksgiving, there were more directors present than at any previous session—seventy-nine—so that the directors-at-large were outnumbered by the directors named by local associations in something like the proportion of four to one.

In accordance with the constitution the Board elected by secret ballot a nominating committee of five: Dora V. Smith, chairman, Holland D. Roberts, Mark Neville, Charles Swain Thomas, and Robert C. Pooley.

The Board considered, in some cases with care and in some cases rather cursorily, the reports of the twenty-six committees, all of which were accepted. In the course of this consideration the following order recommended by the Executive Committee was adopted:

When a new committee shall be appointed, it shall be appointed for a specific term not exceeding three years, except that in the case of a long-term project (like the *Experience Curriculum*) the Executive Committee may make

the term five years. This shall not be understood to forbid reappointment of all or part of any committee.

It is to be understood that committees appointed more than five years preceding this action shall be asked to make terminal reports in 1940. Those appointed more than three and less than five years before this action shall make terminal reports in 1941, and the terms of all other committees shall be considered to end in 1942.

A motion was passed asking the Executive Committee to publish *Educating for Peace*, a teachers' book prepared by the Committee on International Relations and approved by the Publications Committee but delayed by refusal of D. Appleton-Century Company to take the financial responsibility. (The Executive Committee later ordered that this should be the first publication, to be carried through as rapidly as possible.)

Business being incomplete at adjournment time Thanksgiving noon, the Board convened again after the dinner on Friday night and finished the agenda. The nominating committee then presented the following slate of officers, for whom the secretary was instructed to cast the ballot of the assembly: president, E. A. Cross, Colorado State Teachers College; first vice-president, Robert C. Pooley, University of Wisconsin; second vice-president, Helene W. Hartley, Syracuse University; secretary-treasurer, W. Wilbur Hatfield; member of the Executive Committee for three years, the retiring president, Essie Chamberlain; advisers to the editor of the *English Journal*, Alice V. Brower, A. B. Davis High School, Mount Vernon, New York; Adelaide Cunningham, Commercial High School, Atlanta, Georgia; A. B. Herr, Bala-Cynwyd High School, Bala-Cynwyd, Pennsylvania; Frank DeLay, New Trier Township High School, Winnetka, Illinois; and Marian H. Pettis, Lewis and Clark High School, Spokane, Washington.

Upon motion of Angela M. Broening, of Baltimore, the Board expressed its affection for Miss Chamberlain and its gratitude to her for her fine engineering of the Council's complicated work during the past year.

The Annual Business Meeting (of the individual members of the Council) occurred at four-thirty on Friday afternoon. After the usual report of the secretary and the business of hearing invitations from cities which would have liked to be host to the convention in 1940, the following resolution, offered by E. A. Cross, was adopted and ordered sent to all affiliated local associations for their approval and promulgation:

WHEREAS, Books, magazines, and newspapers remain the chief means by which the individual may transcend the limits of his own direct experience,

so that habit and skill in choosing and using them is of paramount importance, therefore be it

*Resolved*, That American schools imperatively need a large and immediate increase in the supply of books and current periodicals, not only such materials as may be used in unison study by whole classes, but even more the wide variety of books of all sorts which should be available to satisfy and broaden individual interests; and be it further

*Resolved*, That school administrators and supervisors be urged to increase several fold the provision for adding to and administering the supply of fiction, general reading, and periodicals in school and homeroom libraries.

The Nominating Committee proposed six persons to be elected as directors-at-large for a period of three years, and this slate was unanimously approved: Merritt Y. Hughes, University of Wisconsin; Harlen M. Adams, Chico (Calif.) State College; Warner G. Rice, University of Michigan; Lennox Grey, Columbia University; Helen Heffernan, State Department of Elementary Education, Sacramento, California; Robert Mahoney, Director of Curriculum, Hartford, Connecticut.

### THE COLLEGE SECTION MEETINGS

The college group held three separate meetings, and was represented on each of the four general programs. Here follow summaries of papers by Professor Howard Mumford Jones and Dr. Charles Longmuir, and of an address by Professor Hoyt H. Hudson. Elsewhere in this issue may be found the texts of papers by Professors Blanche Colton Williams, Albert Baugh, and Winfield H. Rogers. Papers by Professors Pearl Hogrefe ("Our Opportunities in a Democracy"), Merritt Y. Hughes ("Our Social Contract"), Earl Daniels ("The Necessity for the Ivory Tower"), Warner G. Rice ("Articulation of the Secondary School and the College"), Louise Rosenblatt ("Literature and Human Values"), and Harlan Hatcher ("The Novel as an Educative Force") will appear in early issues of *College English*.

### DILEMMAS CONFRONTING ENGLISH TEACHERS

HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

The first dilemma of the college English department is to know where to begin. The last fifty years have seen an enormous increase in the number of high-school graduates. Many of these read very little in the classics, although acquaintance with a selected list of literary classics and some knowledge of the history of literature are still expected as

preparation for college work. The demands made upon high-school English—manners, movies, radio, newspapers, letters, social implications of current fiction, etc.—make it impossible for the college to count on a general, uniform standard of preparation. While the high schools are struggling with the average masses of American youth and give more and more time to the contemporary and less to the classics and literary history, the colleges cling to the older concept of a humane education appropriate to the education of an intellectual élite and hold to the historical approach to literature.

With this gap continually widening, it would be well if representatives of college English, high-school English, and the professional world of education should sit down to discuss the aims of teaching literature common to all three branches of education. If the high schools will only decide upon something reasonably uniform, simple, and sensible, and teach it well, the college department can begin where the secondary school leaves off.

A related dilemma is the preparation of English teachers. The demands for training in the school of education are met in hours taken from the study of English, so that the future high-school teacher is usually less well prepared in subject matter than she would be if she had not elected to teach. The general impression that teaching high-school English is a girl's job, the distaste for restrictions upon one's private life, the aversion to the required courses in education—and discouragement from professors of English—often drive away bright students, which means that future teachers usually come from the middle and lowest thirds of the English class. At the same time, new and extraordinary demands are made upon them. But they will not be made better teachers if they are required to get further training as practical psychologists, dramatic coaches, and observers of politics and international affairs. The only possible solution seems to require that the colleges must explore more sympathetically the problems of secondary education and that the schools of education must likewise explore the values which the English department holds to be enduring cultural values.

The last dilemma grows out of the endeavor—perhaps a desperate attempt to retain in the department students who are being attracted away by the social studies—to approach the study of English as if it were one of the social sciences. The search after social values in literature has gone forward at a great rate in the high schools and has invaded the colleges. Many departments have a right wing and a left wing. An honorable desire to defend democracy has led many teachers to stress the



democratic spirit in English and American letters. The Educational Policies Commission in its pamphlet *The Purposes of Education in a Democracy* has frankly taken sides with a particular concept of the state and desires the educational world to support that concept. But this means that English teachers are expected to employ literature for nonliterary ends, to sacrifice the aesthetic values to the social.

Threatened with loss of students if it clings to the older aim and with loss of its proper educational purpose if it adopts the newer aim, English teaching can find the solution to the problem in the direction indicated by the report of the Committee of Twenty-four. Literary study is not one of the social sciences but complementary to them. The literary classics are one of the principal means by which civilized values are maintained, and we must continue to offer them as the central and significant "core" of any English curriculum. They have wisdom to offer; through them rising generations can be made aware of the past as a vital element in human life. If we reduce history and literature to a remote corner of the curriculum, I fail to see how our society will escape being cast adrift upon the tossing sea of contemporary controversy.

#### JUDGING THE RESULTS<sup>1</sup>

CHARLES R. LANGMUIR

I propose that the first measure of the goodness of an examination is its reliability or accuracy in ranking individuals in order of merit with respect to what they are being examined in. We need to know how reliable our examination is in order to know how reliable are the decisions which we make upon the results of it.

The second measure for judging an examination is the extent to which the examiner is able to specify the sort of inferences that can be validly drawn from the results of it. Since other people will use the results to make judgments about the one examined, we have to see whether there is any basis in the nature of the examination for the sort of judgments that may be made. Of course we cannot do this in detail for each individual; the whole idea of a liberal arts college assumes the importance of generalized education and therefore limits its judgments to a generalized estimate of individuals.

But a generalized estimate is not useful unless the elements that have entered into the estimate are known; it cannot be widely used until there is substantial agreement upon the details of intellectual performance

<sup>1</sup> To be published in full in the *Harvard Educational Review*, March, 1940.

which the general terms imply. The argument leads us to the conclusion that in defining the good examination in English we are specifying the purpose of the instruction—and specifying to the point where no ambiguity remains.

Of course we are actually engaged in offering the examinations without the necessary agreements having been made; but I suggest that by progressively improving the comprehensive examination we shall help to clarify the purposes of education and thus approximate our logical ideal. The uneasiness of mind induced by a realistic inspection of examination papers will disturb the teacher's tranquillity and lead to improvement in the examination through more precise definition of purposes.

Finally, I would note the effect of current objective tests in clarifying issues, cutting through verbal ambiguities and lofty generalizations, and raising the fundamental question of what education is for. Let the professor of English write fifty questions and then answer them himself to set up specific examples of the performances expected to result from his instruction. Writing the answers is an X-ray treatment. Though we may not curtail our desires, we can limit our demands to the realm of possibility.

#### THE PROPER TRAINING FOR THE COLLEGE TEACHER OF ENGLISH

H. H. HUDSON

The properly trained college teacher will have (1) wide and profound experience as a reader of literature. He will have (2) experience as a student of literature, learning (a) how literary history and biography are written, verified, and criticized; learning (b) how literary criticism is written, with the construction of his own (tentative) system of criticism. He will have (3) experience in presenting the results of his study, in both oral and written presentations. He will (4) study the English language, historical grammar, and the transmission of texts. A fair share of the training of the college teacher must be self-imposed and self-directed—his reading of literature, for example, his travel, his writing for publication. The usual graduate training serves best at points 2a and 4 of the above program; it should do more upon points 2b and 3; and it might foster the prospective teacher's own taste and activity with respect to point 1.

## CURRENT ENGLISH FORUM<sup>1</sup>

*"All through one's life there seem to be opportunities to do good." If "there" is an expletive, what is the subject of "seem"? If "opportunities" is the subject, what is the explanation of the infinitive "to be"?*

M. M. S.

*There* is an expletive or anticipatory subject; the "real subject" is *opportunities*. *To be* is the object or complement or adjunct of *seem*: "... opportunities to do good seem to be." Perhaps the construction would be more easily seen if *exist* was substituted for *be*: "... there seem to exist opportunities to do good" ("... opportunities to do good seem to exist").

*Can an adverb modify a preposition or a conjunction? If not, how would the following sentences be explained?*

1. *He was lying nearly under the porch.*
2. *Just as he entered the house, he met his father.*

M. M. S.

In 1, *nearly* does not modify *under*, but the whole phrase *under the porch*. This is an adverbial phrase, so the adverb modifies "another adverb."

In 2, *just* modifies the adverbial clause *as he entered the house*, not the conjunction *as*.

*How can an expression with two genitives, as in "These hobbies of Frank's at least kept him out of mischief," be defended?*

A. T. F.

The double genitive is a stock English idiom of old and general use and does not need to be defended. Probably a desire for emphasis and questions of word order brought it into use, or at least continue it. The idiom has a slightly informal note ("Now this stammering of Harry's—what can you tell me about it?" or "a play of Shakespeare's" as contrasted

<sup>1</sup> Questions for this department should be sent to Current English Forum, in care of *English Journal* or *College English*, 211 W. Sixty-eighth St., Chicago, Ill.

with "a play of Shakespeare"). Occasionally it carries a different or more exact meaning than the simple genitive would: "some idea of Professor Bailey" would ordinarily mean a description of the professor; "some idea of Professor Bailey's" would mean an idea he had originated.

It is a useful idiom and we should not like to be kept from expressions like these: "a friend of mine"; "a friend of my father's"; "If he said that, he's no friend of Peggy's"; "this country of ours"; "that imp of yours."

For a discussion of the idiom (which perhaps stresses too much its tone) see George O. Curme, *Syntax*, pages 75-77.

*What is the practice in regard to the use of a capital letter after a colon?*

A. I. S.

When the colon stands between two clauses that are roughly of equivalent value (the second an elaboration of the first or a restatement of it, for example), a small letter is usual:

And in 1932 a new game, pinball, was introduced which could be played simply for fun, at a nickel a turn, as well as with gambling intent, and it swept the country: pinball boards were to be found in unmolested operation in drug-stores, tobacco stores, hotel corridors, cafés, and all sorts of other places.—*Harper's Magazine*, December, 1939, p. 44.

When the first element of the sentence is introductory to the second and the second is an independent clause in form, a capital is usual:

And so I dared to ask my newly made friend: Why cannot Jews and Christians unite and settle once and for all this so-called Jewish problem, which after all is equally a Christian problem?—*Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1938, p. 233.

The whole problem of teaching Freshman English lifts itself into a universal problem of college education—a problem upon which people have been writing almost since colleges began: What are colleges for?—*College English*, November, 1939, p. 139.

Probably capitals would be more frequently found after colons in copy that has not been subjected to editing in accordance with stylebooks than in published work.

P. G. PERRIN



## NEWS AND NOTES

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### THE PERIODICALS

#### THE GENERAL MAGAZINES

American democracy and American letters have, until the last twenty-five years or so, assumed that imperfect man can struggle consciously toward justice and rationality. If there was a corrigible provincial optimism in this view, may there not today be an excess of cynicism? Yes, Howard Mumford Jones declares in the November *Atlantic*, the time is ripe for some inspiring word; our artists owe us a firmer expression of their belief in democracy than has been implicit in most of their recent works.

The trouble with our contemporary literature is that it accepted carelessly certain powerful European influences without adjusting them to the American belief that democracy invigorates literature and that a noble literature reinvigorates the moral nature of man. The implications of these countervailing European influences may be noted as follows: of naturalism, that men are the helpless products of hereditary and environmental forces; of Freudianism, that the irrational is the most powerful urge in life; of the Marxian theory of literature, that the class to which one more or less helplessly belongs conditions all that he does and thinks; of intellectualist criticism, that true literature is the property of the intelligentsia, who may properly ignore the vulgar herd.

Noting that these influences brought considerable gains to our literature, Mr. Jones yet feels that we have gone too far. Though our writers seem to be democratic by temperament, they are antidemocratic in method. Not wishing the surrender of honest convictions, nor a literature of propaganda, nor milk-and-water optimism, nor didactic writing, he would have our literature insist that the human struggle has its nobler side and so reflect the ideals of society rather than merely mirror its defects.

"Swift's melancholia is the melancholia of Hamlet, and at its root is very much the same—a dichotomy of personality expressing itself in an abnormal sensitivity to the disparity between the world as it should be and the world as one sees it." Thus W. B. C. Watkins in the autumn issue of the *Southern Quarterly*, under the title, "Absent Thee from Felicity."

Though Swift wrote in prose, he handled words and images like a poet. The nearest equivalent in the Augustan age to expression of the most profound sense of tragedy felt in Elizabethan drama is not in the dramatists at all but primarily in Swift and, at times, in Pope. It is Swift's essentially poetic treatment of his material which explains largely the depth and power of his best satire and which carries him into tragedy when he attempts to convey a profound and tragic disillusionment with himself and with all life—Hamlet's melancholia.

Sex, in the play a symbol of man's decay and corruption, is likewise for Swift a symbol of man's bestiality. The fastidious nature shrinks from it and is morbidly attracted, is intensely conscious of both the bestial and the spiritual. The result is for Swift, as for Hamlet, "bitter self-reproach, self-satire, agony of soul, with consequent lashing out in self-defense at all about him . . . turning on them and on himself the tragic light of truth, which no man can bear because its intensity shrivels him to nothingness or worse."

Though Swift probably did not originally plan the *Fourth Voyage* to end in identifying the Yahoos with mankind, the identification, whether against or with his will, has the power of tragic conviction. The repeated imagery of excrement and filth is a poetic device used by others than Shakespeare and Donne. The final touch of humor, when Gulliver seeks sanctuary from the smell of human beings in the ammoniac stables, expresses perfectly the heartbreaking despair of a man who has had a vision of perfection from which he has awakened to sordid reality. The ideal makes the real unbearable. His satire passes over into tragedy.

In the autumn number of the *Southern Review* Arthur Mizener, after reviewing half-a-dozen recent works of criticism, concludes that "there is no very obvious common denominator among these recent books of criticism, unless it be their apparently common desire to deal in a revolutionary fashion with the metaphysics which is the circumambient air for literary criticism." These writers often desert consideration of the poems in hand for more general problems of metaphysics, ethics, and theology. Much of what they write is fascinating, but their holidays begin as explanations of poetry and end as jerry-built explanations of the universe.

Among the books reviewed are John Crowe Ransom's *The World's Body*, G. R. Elliott's *Humanism and Imagination*, Edd Winfield Parks's *Segments of Southern Thought*, Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality*, Herbert Read's *Poetry and Anarchism*, and I. A. Richards' *Interpretation in Teaching*.

Ransom's book is honored for its acuteness of perception, richness of ideas, and wit; its purpose is to place poetry on an equal footing with science by showing that it is a kind of knowledge quite as important as science. Equal space is devoted to Caudwell. Mizener decides that Caudwell's historical materialism is not a method of analysis but a dogma, and the description of the world in accord with this dogma is a myth.

The fiftieth anniversary of Browning's death brings from Leonard Bacon "some timid remarks, mainly summaries of elder and better opinions," set forth in the December 9 issue of the *Saturday Review of Literature*. During these fifty years three firms alone have sold two hundred thousand copies of his works. Browning societies seem to have vanished—an organization of highbrows, says Bacon, who monopolized the true word and were clearly a combine operating in restraint of trade. "Their dark elucidations still lend point to Professor Lounsbury's satisfactory remark: 'Browning commentators are like fog-horns. They indicate that there is a fog but do nothing to dispel it.'"

Admitting Browning's predilection for the abstruse and the complex, his distressing tendency "to explain the unknown in terms of the unheard of," Bacon nonetheless considers him the most powerful of the Victorians. More than any of his contemporaries, he had the Chaucerian interest and curiosity; he found an almost illicit thrill—and passed it on to his reader—in penetrating psychological mystery. Among the poets of the nineteenth century only Wordsworth and Byron also "undertook the gigantic and achieved it," as in *The Ring and the Book*, which contains somewhere within it "everything any poet would give his soul to know he had done."

What sets William Faulkner above all his American contemporaries is—according to Conrad Aiken, in the November *Atlantic*—his continuous preoccupation with the novel as form. Faulkner is an easy target for critics because of blunders and bad habits and wilful bad writing; but his style as a whole is extraordinarily effective. "It is a persistent offering of obstacles, a calculated system of screens and obtrusions, of confusions and ambiguous interpolations and delays, with one express purpose; and that purpose is simply to keep the form—and the idea—fluid and unfinished, still in motion, as it were, and unknown, until the dropping into place of the very last syllable."

Noted among the most constant of Faulkner's devices for the achievement of complex form are the manipulation of viewpoint and the use of the flash-back. Fuguelike in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Wild Palms*, this

alternation of viewpoint contributes also to the symphonic structure of *The Sound and the Fury*, perhaps the most beautifully wrought of all. "The joinery is flawless in its intricacy; it is a novelist's novel—a whole textbook on the craft of fiction in itself, comparable in its way to *What Maisie Knew* or *The Golden Bowl*."

Noting also the headlong and tumultuous abundance of Faulkner's invention, whether of character or of episode, Aiken quotes a passage from Henry James's essay on Balzac as applicable, with scarcely a reservation, to Faulkner. All that is lacking is the greater range of understanding and tenderness, the greater freedom from special preoccupations—nor is it denied that for these, too, Faulkner has the gifts.

Before Finland had been made by the newspapers into a world-repository of valor, democracy, military prowess, and financial responsibility, Eunice Tietjens had discovered another sort of virtue there. Writing in the November *Poetry*, she says that in Finland "the poet is looked up to if he is good, and ignored if he is bad, in exactly the same way that any other worker is looked up to or ignored." Not knowing Finnish, Mrs. Tietjens merely hazards a guess that the Finnish poets write more directly to the national consciousness than ours do. At any rate, she hopes that America may learn the simple attitude toward poets and so help us to a greater normality.

The problem of selecting graduate students is discussed in the *Journal of Higher Education* for November by William J. Brink, assistant dean of the graduate school, Northwestern University. After presenting an analysis of current policies and practices in eighty-eight selected schools, Dean Brink concludes that more reliable methods of selecting graduate students are needed. It appears that neither the applicant's scholastic record, the rating of his college, nor a combination of these gives an adequate basis for admission. But to improve the selection of students something more than accumulation of information about the individual is needed: the schools must themselves define their objectives. If, for example, most graduate students become teachers, then it is necessary to ascertain the prerequisites for success in graduate work and teaching in order to select the proper students for admission. This implies the development of techniques appropriate for the study of each applicant and also an obligation to encourage only those for whom there is reasonable probability of success.



Among the numerous contrasting characteristics which Frank O'Connor describes in his article on William Butler Yeats and Æ in the autumn, 1939, issue of the *Yale Review* are the divergent religious and political views of these two friends. Yeats was a typical Catholic in religion; fascist, authoritarian, nationalist, lover of tradition, and hater of reason, in politics. Russell, on the other hand, was a north of Ireland Protestant, Democrat (with leanings toward communism), pacifist, internationalist, despiser of position and class, and, in spite of his mysticism, a thoroughgoing rationalist and humanitarian. Yeats admired Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin, wrote the marching song for O'Duffy's fascists, and would have been glad to serve DeValera.

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### THE BEST SELLERS<sup>1</sup>

#### FICTION

1. *The Nazarene*, by Sholem Asch. Putnam.
2. *Kitty Foyle*, by Christopher Morley. Lippincott.
3. *Escape*, by Ethel Vance. Little.
4. *Moment in Peking*, by Lin Yutang. John Day.
5. *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck. Viking.
6. *Christmas Holiday*, by W. Somerset Maugham. Doubleday.

#### NONFICTION

1. *A Treasury of Art Masterpieces*, ed. Thomas Craven. Simon & Schuster.
2. *Country Lawyer*, by Bellamy Partridge. Whittlesey.
3. *Land below the Wind*, by Agnes Newton Keith. Little.
4. *Days of Our Years*, by Pierre van Paassen. Hillman.
5. *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, by Carl Sandburg. Harcourt.
6. *Inside Asia*, by John Gunther. Harper.

<sup>1</sup> For Christmas week. Compiled from bookstore reports by the *Publishers' Weekly*.

## BOOKS

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### ENGLISH AS SHE IS

Some time ago I had occasion to write in this column the hope that a manual of English might appear which was founded on solid linguistic principles. That hope has been realized in the volume here reviewed.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the hope has been exceeded, tempting the reviewer to superlatives. Professor Perrin has the gift of uniting solid scholarship with a clear and easy expository style. The articles, arranged alphabetically and ranging in length from a few lines to several pages, reveal textbook-writing at its best. Illustrations abound, drawn from a surprisingly wide range of current writing. Pedantry and "stuffiness" are miraculously avoided, despite the tone of assured authority which characterizes the book.

*An Index to English* is three books in one, although the alphabetical arrangement is strictly maintained. Book I (these divisions are mine) is a dictionary of usage, unique in its historical perspective and its impartial treatment of debatable issues. The articles on usage reveal a thorough acquaintance with contemporary research in current English. Book II is a complete grammar of English, including parts of speech, syntax, punctuation, pronunciation, and spelling. Everything that the student needs to know is here, easy to find, easy to read, and thoroughly cross-indexed. Book III is a rhetoric, containing well-developed articles, richly illustrated, on topics such as clearness, economy, emphasis, coherence, etc. A topical index in the Introduction provides the outline for the systematic study of language, rhetoric, grammar, and mechanics. Thus the book is both a text for an organized course and a handy book of reference for the student writer.

Because of its completeness, *An Index to English* has many uses. Primarily it is a text for instruction in college composition, presumably the first course. But I consider it an indispensable handbook for students in advanced composition also. High-school teachers will find it an unparalleled reference book and the source of excellent illustrations in teaching grammar and composition. Courses for the training of English teachers

<sup>1</sup> Porter G. Perrin, *An Index to English*. Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1939. Pp. 680+xv. \$1.60.

will employ it for the customary review of English grammar and especially for its sound linguistic approach.

The spirit of the book is adequately summed up in these few words from the Preface: "From the point of view of this book, good English is English that conveys what the speaker or writer wishes to convey and that is appropriate to the subject and situation, to the expected reader or listener, and to the writer himself. This point of view allows an affirmative presentation of materials, makes it possible to show the potentialities of the language rather than give a list of prohibitions."

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#### ON REREADING CHAUCER

This book<sup>1</sup> by the distinguished medievalist of Smith College covers in its ten chapters, of which three had previously appeared as separate studies, the range of Chaucer's work. Though other aspects of Chaucer's art and intention are of course considered, the coloring emphasis throughout is upon Chaucer's humor as the most pervasive characteristic of his work and the most distinctive trait of his temperament. With this emphasis Chaucerians will agree, as they will upon the quality of Chaucer's humor that Professor Patch discloses. But it is doubtful whether humorous intent will be generally recognized in a good many places where Professor Patch thinks that he detects it.

Apart from the stress laid upon humor and the elements of realism in Chaucer's earlier poems, not the least interesting item in Professor Patch's discussion is his expression of belief that the *House of Fame* and the *Parliament of Fowls* as well as the *Book of the Duchess* were composed as tributes to wedded love and that all three were written for the Lancaster family. Though he does not plainly assert it, he obviously assumes personal intimacy between Chaucer and John of Gaunt. He has not the space to present full evidence, but among that which is suggested it is difficult to see the import of the "ruby in the ring [or that in the brooch] of Chaucer's *Troilus*" and the bequest of a ruby by John of Gaunt to Katherine Swynford.

The chapters on *Troilus* contain probably the most acute observation

<sup>1</sup> Howard Rollin Patch, *On Rereading Chaucer*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939. Pp. xi+269.

and significant interpretation in the entire work. Professor Patch is right in insisting that although the characters act in accord with the tenets of "courtly love," yet Chaucer conceived and presented them as living persons; and he is right, too, in insisting that these persons are moved primarily from within themselves instead of being merely hapless creatures of external fate. And he is surely right in holding that Troilus' laugh at the end and Chaucer's own epilogue are not incongruous additions but are essential indications of Chaucer's attitude toward this story of the unhappy passion of youth in this unstable world. The comments on the character and behavior of Criseyde are keen and illuminating. The analysis of Troilus, particularly the cause of his indecision and helplessness in love, appears less soundly based.

Underlying much of the discussion of the *Canterbury Tales* is the implication that really to appreciate them a reader must keep vividly in mind not merely the particular tale and the teller but all the circumstances under which it is told, the tales which have preceded and those which are to follow, and the reactions of the various pilgrims to one another and to the tales. There is nothing new in this, but teachers and readers of Chaucer alike are not always alert to its importance. There is stimulating and suggestive comment on many of the characters and tales, but there will be disagreement with Professor Patch on several details. For instance, he states more than once that only the Pardoner is wholly outside the bounds of Chaucer's sympathy; certainly the Summoner is as far beyond the pale or farther. "A bettre felawe sholde men noght fynde" is not to be taken as a literal expression of Chaucer's personal estimate of this loathsome scoundrel, and to write of the "Summoner's generosity with his concubine" involves, I think, a misinterpretation of Chaucer's lines. Does the Monk's long array of tragedies show his sentimentality or show his desire to display the kind of learning that would befit so distinguished and liberal-minded a churchman? I feel, too, that Chaucer's touchstone of character was much simpler than Professor Patch implies—that it was simple integrity of personality, being what one pretended to be.

The title, *On Rereading Chaucer*, suggests that there was little intent to bring new information, and it is doubtful whether this work brings any considerable body of significant new interpretation. It does, however, give fresh stimulus to an alertly attentive and understanding re-reading of Chaucer.

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## IN BRIEF REVIEW

## FOR THE GENERAL READER

*Abraham Lincoln: The War Years.* By Carl Sandburg. Harcourt, Brace. Regular buckram-bound, gold-stamped, four-volume edition, \$20 set. De luxe autographed edition, \$50.

*The War Years* completes Sandburg's thirty years' study of Lincoln. Allan Nevins, historian, says: "The most distinctive qualities of Mr. Sandburg's work are two—its pictorial vividness, a product of his graphic style, love of concrete detail, and ability to re-create scenes imaginatively in a few sentences; second, the cumulative force of his detail in building up, step by step, an unforgettable impression of the crowded times, with crisis jostling crisis, problems rising in endless welter—and, *pari passu*, an impression of Lincoln patiently finding his talents, learning to endure the storm, and finally mastering it with sad serenity." This detailed method is so repetitious as to be objectionable to many readers. There are 414 photographs, pictures of important people, linecuts showing letters, documents, and cartoons.

*Moses—Man of the Mountain.* Zora Neale Hurston. Lippincott. \$3.00.

Moses, from the point of view of the American Negro, is the great "Voodoo Man" of the Bible. Of all the fall books none is more fascinating than this retelling of the story of the Hebrew persecution by the talented colored Zora Thurston. Her keen appreciation of human nature as it was, is, and perhaps ever shall be gives to her story of forty years in the wilderness a richness of style and content welcome to present-day readers.

*Verdun.* By Jules Romains. Knopf. \$3.00.

January Book-of-the-Month. That critical group of admirers which has followed the "Men of Good Will" series will welcome this story of the victories and defeats of men of good will. These characters, confused, desperate, facing undreamed-of hazards in a mad world, are of added interest because the same things are happening to other men now. Looking back twenty years, Romains sees a pattern in this seeming chaos; and we assume that in twenty years we may—if we *can* look back then—see clearly intangibles of which now we can only vaguely guess.

*The Nazarene.* By Sholem Asch. Putnam. \$2.75.

A novel based on the life of Christ. For thirty years the author, who is the chief genius employing Yiddish, has been preparing to write this book. It (translated) is a colorful, brilliant panorama of Jerusalem during the life of Christ. Part one pictures Palestine through the eyes of a military governor (reincarnation) under Pontius Pilate. Part two is represented as a gospel according to the disciple Judas Iscariot. Part three is the narrative of Joseph—student of Nicodemus.

*No Arms, No Armour.* By Robert D. Q. Henriques. Farrar. \$2.50.

All-Nations Prize Novel. The story of a young English subaltern—typical of youth swallowed up by military traditions—and a rising cry of protest against the sacrifice. A timely book.

*Figures of Transition.* By Granville Hicks. Macmillan. \$2.50.

The first chapter discusses Victorianism. Later chapters are: "Socialism and Mr. Norris," "The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy," "Samuel Butler: Cautious Rebel," "The Changing Novel," "Oscar Wilde and the Cult of Art," "The Code of the Empire Builders." These writers, says the author, link Victorian and modern literature. So far as possible he has by use of quotations and paraphrases let authors tell their own story. Other writers are discussed in developing his theses.

*The Novel and the Modern World.* By David Daiches. University of Chicago Press. \$2.50.

The motives, techniques, and significance of contemporary literature, all except some very recent products, Daiches says, seem to belong to a transition period between the breakdown of one standard of values and set of beliefs and the establishment of another. Many readers will be particularly interested in his discussion of Joyce and his recent book, *Finnegans Wake*, a conception of a picture of life executed in words which say all things at once to avoid any normative implication. Galsworthy, Conrad, Katherine Mansfield, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Aldous Huxley are analyzed.

*Today in American Drama.* By Frank H. O'Hara. University of Chicago Press. \$2.50.

Mr. O'Hara discusses recent popular plays, their motives and meanings, and the standards which our age is seeking in "Tragedies without Finality," "Comedies without a Laugh," "Melodrama with a Meaning," and "Farce with a Purpose."

*The Time of Your Life.* By William Saroyan. Harcourt. \$2.50.

Saroyan's newest play, presented by the Theatre Guild in New York City, has been a great success. To Nick's San Francisco waterfront "honky-tonk" come all sorts and conditions of men and women. Comedy, tragedy, and sentiment are subjects of the compassion and insight with which Saroyan pictures the varied characters who visit Nick's in one afternoon and evening.

*Arts and the Man.* By Irwin Edman. Norton. \$1.75.

A book on aesthetics, says the author of *Philosopher's Holiday*, is justified not so much by leading the reader to further books on aesthetics as by returning him to the arts with a sharpened and deeper appreciation.

*Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats.* By T. S. Eliot. Harcourt. \$1.25.

These poems about cats were written for friends and are now shared with the public. "You ought to know Mistoffelees," and Gus (Asparagus); the Theater Cat, Bustapher Jones; the Cat About Town, Skimbleshanks; the Railway Cat, Old Deuteronomy; and—but his first poem is "The Naming of Cats."

*Too Much College.* By Stephen Leacock. Dodd, Mead. \$2.00.

The purpose of this book, says the witty educator, is to discuss the discrepancies between education and life. "Life, we learn too late, is in the living, in the tissue of every day and hour. I would make the school and college program consist of a maximum of stimulation and a minimum of examinations." Dr. Leacock criticizes very severely the present system of working to pass exams, of reviews, of substituting text knowledge for literary appreciation, and the "dressing of children's minds," regardless of interest, in Latin, mathematics, etc. Especially he decries the long years—"education eating up life."

*Past the End of the Pavement.* By Charles G. Finney. Holt. \$2.00.

The author's first book, *The Circus of Dr. Lao*, won the Booksellers' Award as the most original volume published in 1938. Readers who enjoy small-town stories and escapades of boys will chuckle over this tale.

*The Sacramento: River of Gold.* By Julian Dana. Farrar. \$2.50.

Dedicated "To that nameless fellow, The First Man who used the river as a highway." Mr. Dana's story of the Sacramento—the seventh of the "River Series" of twenty-four to be published by Farrar—ranks high in excellence. A frontispiece map makes it easy to follow the development. The treatment of Indian occupation is particularly sympathetic. The entrance of Chinese and European workers necessitated by the change from wheat-growing to fruit culture is wisely treated, while river traffic and the fun of living near the river are good adventure. Mr. Dana's love for his subject never wanes. When reminded that the land does not need as many people as it once did, he says, "To produce a well-rounded human being takes just as much exposure to nature as ever." Of particular value is the inclusion of Miss Skinner's essay, "Rivers and American Folk." Many readers plan a collection of the series.

*Where the Rivers Meet.* By Ward Dorrance. Scribner's. \$2.75.

The Missouri, Illinois, and Ohio as they flow into the Mississippi. Dorrance with two companions explored these rivers in a small boat, camping nights on the shore, making friends with other travelers, with the people who lived on the banks, and with towns and villages. His is a genuine river book to which he brings sensitivity to the moods of waters, a great human sympathy, and a love of all that has gone before. This is a book to add to your Farrar series.

*Horses and Americans.* By Phil Stong. Stokes. \$5.00.

A historical and informative book on horses—their role on the American farm and in the city, their importance in the Civil War, etc. A handsome book for the right people.

*The Trampling Herd, Part I.* By Paul I. Wellman. Garrick & Evans. \$3.00.

This is an excellent companion book to *Horses and Americans*. It is the story of cattle from the days of the Spaniard to the dude ranch.

*Lhasa: The Holy City.* By F. Spencer. Harper. \$5.00.

Sixty-four pages of photographs and eight plates in full color illustrate this fascinating journey story of Tibet.

*Caribbean Treasure.* By Ivan T. Sanderson. Viking. \$3.00.

The author of *Animal Treasure* presents a similar attractive study of small Caribbean mammals. Attractively illustrated.

*Humane Endeavor: The Story of the China War.* Haldore Hanson. Farrar. \$2.50.

The author was correspondent for the Associated Press in Peiping when the war started. Mr. Hanson saw events on both sides and as far as is possible he writes unbiased, authentic, and accurate accounts of what is happening in both armies and of the hopes and ambitions of leaders who are responsible for the war. The last two chapters discuss the effect upon the policy of Japan of the recent European conflicts and seizures of territory.

*Candle in the Dark: A Postscript to Despair.* By Irwin Edman. Viking. \$1.25.

"The darkness now seems absolute. Men before us have forgotten that it hides the morning star." The author of *Philosopher's Holiday* is keenly aware of our world-catastrophe and he wisely asks, "What can we do to keep sane in a world gone mad?" He emphasizes the necessity for "historical-mindedness"; while "eternal forms and types of happiness and suffering, of cruelty and wisdom, of barbarism and saintliness perpetually return to the human scene," hope springs eternal and civilization does not die.

*Fifty Best American Short Stories, 1915-1939.* Edited by Edward J. O'Brien. Houghton Mifflin.

In his introduction O'Brien says: "Twenty-five years have made a difference in the American short story comparable to the difference between the tone and feeling of Pope and the tone and feeling of Shelley." This collection of stories affords a graphic means by which the reader may sense the changes in values, in morals, and in morale and expression in American life since the World War.

*Science Marches On.* By Walter Shephard. Harcourt, Brace. \$3.00.

"The story in non-technical language of man's knowledge of the universe he lives in" covers an amazingly wide range of simple and complex things. "Conquest of Material," "Control of Force," and "Whither Is Science Going?" are chapter heads. Factual and informative, it is an exciting and significant book.

*The Catholic Crisis.* By George Seldes. Messner. \$3.00.

The contents are in three parts: "Fascism, Democracy, and the Church"; "Catholic Actions and Reactions"; "The Vatican and the World." Mr. Seldes points out the problem facing the Catholic church as it faces the rest of the world: reaction or progress? He asks: Has the church a link with fascism? Does Father Coughlin speak for the church? Is influence centered upon the movies? Is there a political machine? He says: "I am attempting to let the facts speak for themselves." He hopes that his book will be accepted as a warning and not as an attack.

*The Integration of the Personality.* By Carl G. Jung. Farrar. \$3.00.

"Whether primitive or not, mankind always stands upon the verge of those actions that it performs itself but does not control. The whole world wants peace and the whole world prepares for war, to give but one example. Mankind is powerless against mankind, and gods, as they have ever done, show it the ways of fate." Dr. Jung discusses the symbols through which the deepest levels of the unconscious manifest themselves in dreams and visions.

*America at the Movies.* By Margaret Farrand Thorp. Yale Press. \$2.75.

The author discusses the effect of 85,000,000 customers a week upon the movies and the influence of the movies upon the patrons. The guess of the producers is that the period in which the 85,000,000 are living is about 1854. In the handling of apparatus she considers makers of films supreme masters; they have just begun to learn the technique of handling ideas.

*Marcus Brutus.* By Max Radin. Oxford University. \$2.75.

This is a history of Rome 44 B.C. and a biography of Brutus as statesman and also as a unique personality who sacrificed his own happiness for an ideal which only his reason accepted.

*Some Old Portraits.* Doubleday. By Booth Tarkington. \$5.00.

The author of *Rumbin Galleries* has selected twenty-two portraits from great periods of English and early American art and discussed their history.

*A Turning Wind.* By Muriel Rukeyser. Viking. \$2.00.

Critics praise the originality, the purpose, and brilliancy of this young poet.

*The Connecticut River and Other Poems.* By Reuel Denney. Foreword by Stephen Vincent Benét. Yale University Press. \$2.00.

This volume is one of the Yale series edited by Stephen Vincent Benét.

*The Best Poems of 1939.* Edited by Thomas Moulton. Harcourt. \$2.00.

Seventeenth annual volume of verse selected from periodicals.

*Whistler's Father.* By Albert Parry. Bobbs-Merrill. \$3.50.

Major George Whistler built the first Russian railroad, and his ten years in Russia give material for an exciting book. Illustrations are excellent.

Whistler's mother's biography, coming at this time, acquires added interest, particularly as she does not seem always to have been the serene lady her son has pictured.

*Across the Busy Years: Recollections and Reflections.* By Nicholas Murray Butler. \$3.75.

The president of Columbia University had laid an excellent foundation for reminiscences. As a young man he began recording his experiences as soon after their occurrence as possible. The book begins with his Paterson, New Jersey, childhood, followed by his undergraduate days at Columbia and his European travels. There are chapters on "Building a University," "Fourteen Republican National Conventions," "Behind the Scenes in Politics," and "On Keeping Out of Public Office."

*Eternal Passion in English Poetry.* Selected by Edith Wharton and Robert Norton. Appleton. \$2.50.

Mrs. Wharton in her Preface says that she believes this to be the first attempt to gather in one volume the most beautiful (their choice) of English love poems.

*The Face of a Nation: Poetical Passages from the Writings of Thomas Wolfe.* Edited by John Hall Wheelock. Scribners. \$2.75.

Thomas Wolfe had said that he would rather be a poet than anything else in the world. John Hall Wheelock in his Introduction to this collection says, "Now with the passage of time it becomes clear that . . . Thomas Wolfe was, first of all, a poet—a lyric poet of extraordinary intensity, with a sensitivity to word music, to rhythm, and cadence, which can be likened only to that of Whitman. . . . Most of Wolfe's books are very long. These carefully chosen selections afford an opportunity to the busy reader to become acquainted with him in his most lyrical aspect."



## FOR THE SCHOLAR

*Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights.* By Henry W. Wells. Columbia University Press. \$2.75.

This analysis of major tendencies in English drama from 1576 to 1642 classifies the plays according to dominant qualities and provides fresh interpretations of the work of the major dramatists and the influence of medieval and Renaissance thought. The discussion begins with such serious plays as Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, and Shakespeare's *Othello*, and deals in the later pages with fantastic and satirical comedy and the comedy of manners.

*The Personal Heresy: A Controversy.* By E. M. W. Tillyard and C. S. Lewis. Oxford University Press. \$2.00.

A book for the literary critic, containing six chapters in which C. S. Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard alternate in presenting their opposing views of the relation of the poet to his work.

*The Renaissance and English Humanism.* By Douglas Bush. University of Toronto Press. \$1.50.

A vividly written essay re-evaluating the influence of the Christian humanistic tradition upon our culture. The four chapters deal with "Modern Theories of the Renaissance," "Continental Humanism," "English Humanism," and "Milton."

## FOR THE STUDENT

*What To Read: Alumni Reading Lists, Third Series.* Compiled by Edith Thomas, Fred L. Dimock, and Nelis R. Kampenga, with the aid of members of the faculties of the University of Michigan. University of Michigan Press. \$1.25.

An excellent annotated general reading list for mature readers seeking authoritative recommendations in special fields. The titles are conveniently classified under a wide range of headings and subheadings.

*Public Speaking for Technical Men.* By S. Marion Tucker. McGraw-Hill. \$3.00.

A popular, practical, and anecdotal treatment of the platform problems of speakers trained in the technical fields. Mr. Tucker offers suggestions as to how to overcome nervousness before an audience, how to study the audience, how to open the speech and make contact with the audience, how to develop desirable platform manners and platform techniques, how to improve voice quality, vocabulary, and sentence structure, how to speak over the radio, and numerous other speech problems encountered by the scientists and technological experts.

*English Literature and Its Backgrounds, Book I.* Edited by Bernard D. N. Grebanier and Stith Thompson. Cordon.

A voluminous anthology of English essays, poems, and plays presented chiefly in complete units or extensive selections. The basis for inclusion has been not only intrinsic merit but extent of influence as well. Each period is introduced by a brief but informative evaluation.